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SAVEUR



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PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI

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This month at **SAVEUR.COM** you'll find tips for mixing **classic tiki cocktails**; a method for making **Cypriot tomato salad**; a conversation with Frederick Kaufman, author of the new book ***A Short History of the American Stomach***; a guide to **buying crab**; a slide show of the **best rhubarb recipes** from the **SAVEUR** kitchen archives; and many other exclusive online features.



Pupu Perfect

Prepare a Polynesian feast with our recipes for crab rangoon, Shanghai chicken wings, and rumaki.



On a Roll

Master the art of filling and rolling spring rolls with our step-by-step tutorial.



A Sooner Supper

Capture the spirit of Oklahoma with a menu of fried okra, chicken fried steak, and pecan pie.

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FIRST

The New Brown

How a skeptic learned to love whole-grain rice

BROWN RICE? Yeesh, I thought to myself last spring when the writer Peggy Knickerbocker sent a pitch letter my way about doing a feature-length article for *SAVEUR* on that, well, unglamorous food. For me—a child of 1960s and '70s San Francisco—the ingredient was part and parcel of every hippie-esque cliché I could think of, from Earth Shoes to Peter Maxx posters. In addition, brown rice was a food I'd never managed to cook to my satisfaction in my own kitchen. Every time I tried, it came out like either gluey porridge or a pot full of pebbles. The ingredient, I was convinced, had more to do with "health food"—a concept that always makes me nervous—than it did with gastronomic pleasure. Or did it?

I continued to read Peggy's pitch; after all, she's a person whose ideas about food I trust utterly. The San Francisco native is, among other things, the author of five cookbooks and a longtime contributing editor to *SAVEUR* (she even wrote our very first cover story, "The Seven Wonders of Oaxaca", back in 1994). I learned that Peggy wanted to focus her piece on Greg Massa, a Northern California farmer who had recently started selling an organic version of brown rice that he'd cultivated on a farm that had been in his family for four generations. Sampling Massa's rice, Peggy wrote, led to a remarkable discovery. In its cooked form, it was an elegant-tasting, even sumptuous food worthy of prominence on the plate. Peggy also wanted to showcase a number of little-known, robustly flavored varieties of brown rice, like brown basmati and haiga-mai, from Japan, that have been turning up on our market shelves over the past few years.

So, Todd Coleman, *SAVEUR*'s food editor, ordered some of Massa's rice for the staff to try. Peggy was right: the rice was great, damn great, as a matter of fact, and I gave her the assignment. But as we sat down to plates of brown rice slow-cooked with chicken and

chorizo and munched on luscious, toasty brown rice fritters, a question was raised: What exactly *is* brown rice, anyway? I knew, for instance, from years of living in Southeast Asia, that much of the rice available there, especially the versions grown and harvested on small, family-run village farms, is, like brown rice, only minimally processed; the grains' hard, inedible hulls are removed, but usually no further milling is involved. Nevertheless, it



A woman harvesting rice in Air Hangat, a village in the Indonesian province of West Sumatra.

was as white as snow. I was confused. Shouldn't that whole-bran rice be brown in color?

In stepped Ben Mims and Karen Shimizu, two of *SAVEUR*'s assistants, to help get to the bottom of that mystery. What they discovered—that *brown rice* is actually a production term, not an indication of a particular grain's color—brought to light how much there was to learn about this ingredient. That information, and a whole lot more, including the amazing and varied lineup of brown rice recipes that Todd developed, helped bolster Peggy's terrific story. You can read the results in "Born Again" (page 66). Prepare to be converted. —JAMES OSELAND, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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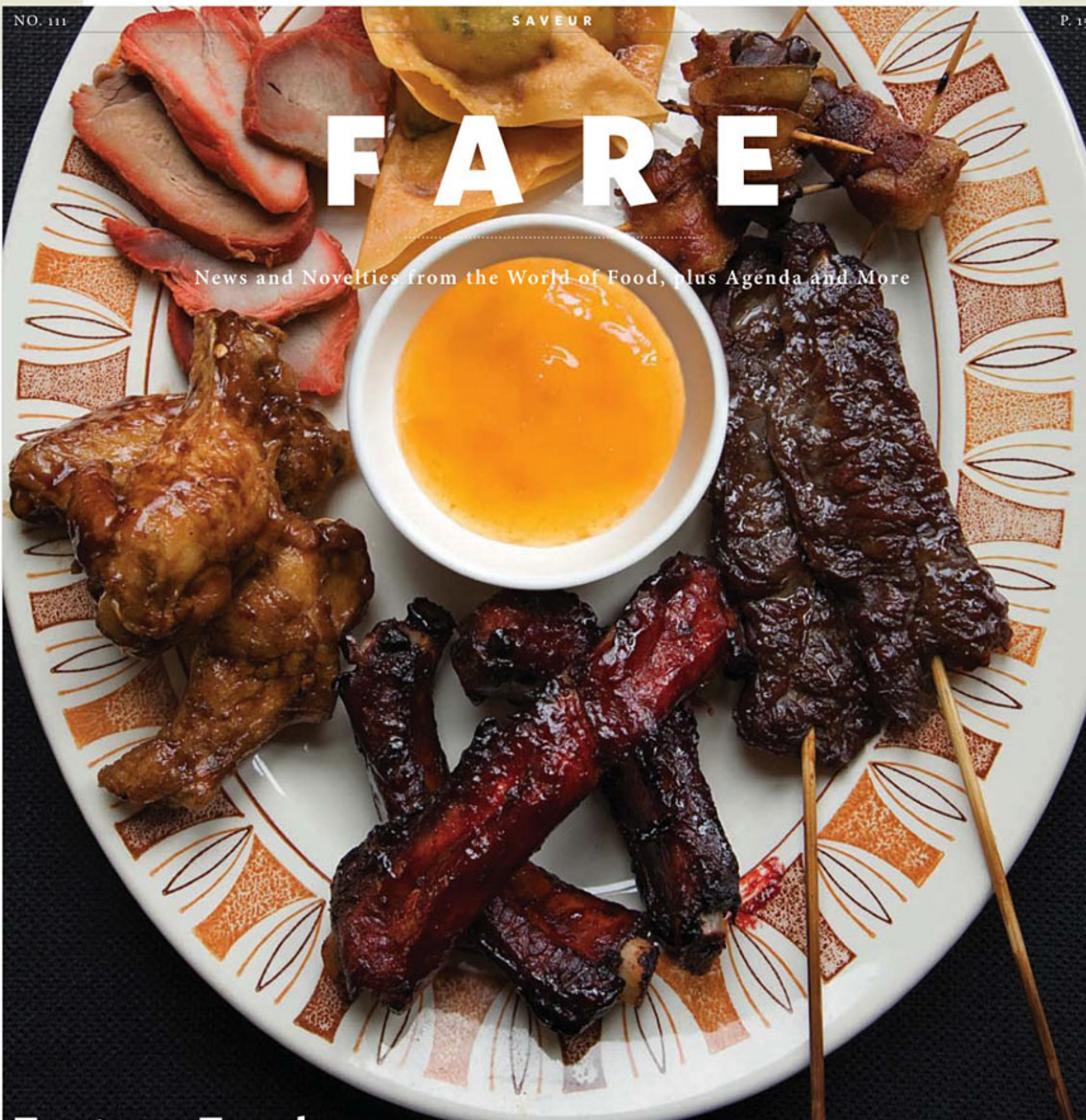


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FARE

News and Novelties from the World of Food, plus Agenda and More

Fantasy Food

I GRUMBLED WHEN MY ten-year-old daughter ordered a pupu platter at a Chinese restaurant recently. What about something fresher tasting? Something more “authentic”? Then the dish arrived: sticky spareribs, glistening chicken wings, deep-fried wontons, crunchy egg rolls, and more. I dived in with gusto, suddenly remembering

how fervently I had once loved this dish.

The pupu platter, a relic of America’s mid-20th-century fascination with the South Pacific, isn’t exactly fashionable today. Indeed, it’s a bit like the slate gray tuxedo I wore to my junior prom: I may look back on it with amused contempt, but deep down I know it had soul. Maybe that particular

comparison leaps to mind because that tux was returned to the rental shop with a Chinese hot mustard stain on the lapel, courtesy of the pupu platter at Kowloon Restaurant, a sprawling tiki cathedral on Route 1

Clockwise, from top: crab rangoon, rumaki, satay, spareribs, chicken wings, and barbecued pork.

RECIPE

Chinese Barbecued Spareribs

SERVES 4

This recipe is based on one that appears in the *Joyce Chen Cook Book* (J. B. Lippincott, 1962) by the author of the same name. For this dish, we like to use leaner, Chinese-style spareribs, also called St. Louis style, from which the breast bones and flaps of cartilaginous meat have been removed. To learn how to butcher your own St. Louis-style spareribs, go to SAVEUR.COM/SPARERIBS.

- 1/3 cup hoisin sauce
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 3 tbsp. dry sherry
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 3/4 tsp. red food coloring
- 1/4 tsp. Chinese five spice powder (see page 108)
- 1 2-lb. slab spareribs, preferably St. Louis style, cut into individual ribs

1. Whisk together hoisin, soy, sherry, garlic, sugar, food coloring, and spice powder in a large bowl. Add ribs; toss to coat with marinade. Set aside, covered with plastic wrap, to let marinate at room temperature for 1 hour.

2. Heat oven to 350°. Arrange a baking rack on top of a rimmed, foil-lined sheet pan. Remove ribs from marinade (reserve marinade); arrange on the rack, meat (not bone) side up. Place pan on middle rack of oven; pour in enough water that it reaches halfway up the sides of the pan, making sure the water does not touch the ribs. Bake ribs for 35 minutes. Baste ribs with reserved marinade; flip and baste again. Bake for 35 minutes more. (Add more water to pan if it dries up.) Raise heat to 450°. Flip ribs again; baste with remaining marinade. Continue baking until ribs are glazed, browned, and tender, about 20 minutes more. Serve with Chinese mustard or duck sauce, if you like.

outside Boston that's still going strong today.

Pupu translates loosely as "small bite" in Hawaiian, even though the 50th state has little to do with the dish. No one is sure who served it first, but a good bet would be Ernest Beaumont Gantt, who opened the legendary Hollywood tiki establishment Don the Beachcomber in 1934. In the cookbook *Beachbum Berry's Taboo Table* (SLG Publishing, 2005), the writer Jeff Berry recounts that Gantt asked his chef, who was Cantonese, to whip up some "exotic" bite-size foods to accompany the house cocktails. The results were essentially Chinese but, because they were served in a setting with palm fronds and puffer fish, diners happily accepted them as Polynesian. A fad was born, and before long restaurant chains like Trader Vic's

W More pupu platter recipes at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

were serving a set assemblage of appetizers, known as the pupu platter, which included crab rangoon (wonton skins stuffed with cream cheese and crabmeat, then deep-fried), barbecued pork (a descendant of char sui, a Cantonese dish), egg rolls, fried chicken wings, beef satay (which guests were sometimes allowed to grill themselves, over blazing tins of Sterno), spareribs, and, often, rumaki (bacon-wrapped water chestnuts and chicken livers, an invention of Don the Beachcomber's). Eventually, suburban Chinese restaurants like Kowloon (which opened in 1950 as the Mandarin House) followed suit, recasting themselves with a Polynesian veneer or, at the very least, serving the beloved pupu platter.

So what if the pupu platter is as American as *The Karate Kid*? With its satisfying flavors and kitschy appeal, it's proved remarkably enduring. That, on further reflection, is more than I can say about my slate gray tuxedo. —Chris Amirault



If the bread is bad, the whole of life is bad," wrote the novelist Henry Miller in a 1945 magazine article. An American who made his name in Paris, Miller presumably knew good bread from bad, and, were he around today, he would surely applaud the efforts of the Parisian bakers and pastry chefs who, for the past 15 years, have organized the Grand Prix de la Baguette de la Ville de Paris, a competition dedicated to preserving the art of the baguette. More than a hundred bakers compete in the contest, which culminates in the naming of the city's ultimate loaf; each contestant submits a traditional French baguette, which, according to contest rules, must measure exactly 70 centimeters long, weigh between 250 and 300 grams, and consist of nothing more than wheat flour, salt, water, and yeast. This year, the award went to Anis

FARE



Bouabsa (above), a 28-year-old baker who is well known in competitive-cooking circles in France: four years ago, he became the youngest person ever to be named *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* (Best Artisan in France), a coveted title conferred every three years by a government-sanctioned group of trade unions. Bouabsa's secret? After three years of experimentation, he says, he discovered that allowing the dough to ferment for up to 30 hours, as opposed to the conventional three, makes for a much more flavorful and delicately textured bread. The results of the contest are more than purely ceremonial: a baguette from Bouabsa's small bakery, *Au Duc de la Chapelle*, in the city's 18th arrondissement, will grace the table of the French president Nicolas Sarkozy every day for the next year. —Carolyn Young

AGENDA

MAY

2-4

BREAUX BRIDGE CRAWFISH FESTIVAL*Breaux Bridge, Louisiana*

Since 1960, Breaux Bridge, in the southern part of the state, has hosted this annual tribute to the local seasonal delicacy. This year's event offers the sweet crustaceans boiled, fried, and in cajun pistols (a regional specialty sandwich stuffed with crawfish meat and melted cheese). Information: www.bbcrawfest.com.



MAY

7-11

SLOW FOOD ON FILM*Bologna, Italy*

At this new film festival hosted by Slow Food, the international organization devoted to preserving food traditions, attendees will feast on a five-day banquet of short-subject and feature-length celluloid gastronomy. The event will culminate in the bestowing of the Golden Snail awards to winning films. Information: 39/051/219-4831.

MAY

14-16

CHILIMJUSHT*Kalash, Pakistan*

This ancient holiday marks the beginning of spring for people of the Kalash tribe, in northwestern Pakistan. Amid singing, dancing, and the exchange of wine, cheese, and milk between neighbors, religious offerings of goats' milk are made by each household in the hopes of bringing a prosperous agricultural season. Information: 800/663-0844.



MAY

17

Anniversary:

CHARLES-MAURICE DE TALLEYRAND-PÉRIGORD*Died, Paris, 1838*

A French nobleman, bishop, diplomat, and patron of the celebrated chef Antonin Carême, Talleyrand hosted elaborate feasts that made political and culinary history. Some 200 years later, Carême's culinary texts still inform haute French cuisine, and Talleyrand is remembered as much for being a gourmand as a statesman.

MAY

20

VESAK*Sri Lanka*

Dansala (food stalls) are central to this full-moon festival celebrating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing. In accordance with the Buddhist precept of charity, guests are lavished with free food, from curries and coconut-and-honey cakes (known as *bibikkan*) to passion fruit juice and iced Ceylon tea. Information: 94/11/243-7059.

MAY

31

Anniversary:

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Developed by two chemists in Worcester, England, Worcestershire sauce was already a British staple before it reached these shores, but the trademarking of the Lea & Perrins label cemented the condiment's place among sauce lovers in America, where it eventually became an iconic ingredient.

STATE PLATES: OKLAHOMA

Okay! Rodgers and Hammerstein sang the praises of Oklahoma's waving wheat, but there's more than grain in the larder of the Sooner State (a nickname earned by anxious homesteaders during the 19th-century land rush). While Oklahoma's "green country", in the northeast, is dotted with peach orchards and pecan groves, the west is home to vast cattle grounds, which provision a carnivore's delight at big-city steak palaces and the mom-and-pop roadhouses along Route 66. Defined by oil booms, dust bowl desperation, immigration, and strong American Indian traditions (a greater number of tribes live here than in any other state), Oklahoma's cuisine is hearty and enduring. —*Leo Rodriguez*



In 1988, Oklahoma officially enshrined the state meal; it includes, clockwise from left, stewed squash, pecan pie, fried okra, and chicken fried steak.

NINE REGIONAL TASTES

Quintessential Oklahoma food experiences not to be missed when you're visiting the state

1. The **seven-inch burger** at the Meers Store & Restaurant, in the town of Lawton; it's made with beef from the company's own herd of Longhorns.

2. The crisp, deep-fried fruit pies (we like the blackberry and apricot versions) from **Nancy Fulton's Fried Pies**, off I-35 in Davis.



3. The powwow and state fair staple known as **Indian tacos**—fry bread (a puffy, deep-fried flat bread), folded around seasoned meat, beans, and cheese.

4. The savory **cured sausage** at Lovera's Family Grocery, in Krebs, a mining town settled by Italians in the 1920s.

5. The fruity **chenin blanc** from StableRidge Winery, in Stroud, an old Route 66 pit stop in the central part of the state.

6. The thick-sliced **smoked bologna** from Elmer's BBQ, in Tulsa.

7. The **banh mi**—sandwiches of roasted pork, pickled daikon, and cilantro—from Banh Mi Bale, in Oklahoma City, a favorite of the town's thriving Vietnamese community.

8. Oklahoma **pecans**; they're meatier, tastier, and brighter in color than the common, paper-shell cultivars, and



they're the main reason the state's pecan pies are so sublime.



9. The grass-fed **bison meat** from Wichita Buffalo Company, based in Hinton; you'll find it in restaurants across the state.

Stick to Your Ribs Though historians believe that chicken fried steak was invented in Texas by Austrian immigrants who used local beef to make a version of their beloved wiener schnitzel, Oklahomans have made this decadent dish their own. Also called country-fried steak, chicken fry, or just CFS, it's composed of inexpensive cuts (usually from beef top round or chuck) pounded to tenderness, battered, fried, and served with pepper-flecked cream gravy. Some of the best chicken fried steak in the state is served at the 36-year-old Ann's Chicken Fry, in Oklahoma City.

Local Hero After working as a private chef for wealthy families and catering for musicians, including Cab Calloway, when they were passing through Tulsa, Cleora Butler (1901-1985), a self-trained cook who was raised on a farm in the eastern part of the state, opened Cleora's Bakery and Catering in Tulsa in 1961. She fricasseed quail for oil kings, brewed her own beer to share with neighbors, and united black and white Tulsans at the table during racially turbulent times. Her cookbook, *Cleora's Kitchens* (Council Oak Books, 1985), doubles as a vividly written memoir spanning the first eight decades of Oklahoma's statehood.



Latest Greatest Oklahoma's cities lay claim to many a creative chef. In Tulsa, James Shrader of Palace Café uses herbs from his parking-lot garden in dishes like miatake mushroom custard. Tuck Curren's year-old Local Table is known for updated classics like Cajun meatloaf. At the Coach House, in Oklahoma City, Kurt Fleischfresser celebrates local ingredients in dishes like Sooner State lamb with ancho-cherry sauce. His latest venture, Musashi's, is a steak house featuring Oklahoma-grown Kobe-style beef. (See THE PANTRY, page 108, for contact information.)

W Recipes for Oklahoma's state meal at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

*Fri. 5:03 p.m.
Cleared my calendar.*

*Sat. 10:15 a.m.
Cleared my mind.*

*Sun. 1:44 p.m.
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FARE

Early Arrivals

IT MIGHT SEEM ODD to celebrate a method for artificial ripening in an age obsessed with seasonal food, but the region of Yorkshire, in northern England, has a distinguished history of hurrying a particularly coveted crop toward a state of perfection: rhubarb. Each spring, farmers there, following a tradition that dates to the late 19th century, “force” rhubarb in dark, heated sheds to produce rosy, sweet-tender stalks that are superior to field-grown rhubarb, which is typically harvested in warmer weather. Chefs and home cooks eagerly await the arrival of “champagne rhubarb”, as this costlier variety is often called, and prepare it in a number of ways, though the most popular is to chop and slow-cook the stalks and serve them with custard. (I also like to roast them with sugar, as shown at right, pour off the tangy syrup that forms in the pan, and drizzle that into cocktails.)

Rhubarb, which originated in Siberia, was used mostly for medicinal purposes in England until the 18th century, when refined sugar became widely available and cooks realized that it could tame the stalks’ assertive astringency. In



1815 horticulturists in London noticed that the plant developed a gentler taste and texture when grown in a warm, dark place. The deprivation of light prevents photosynthesis, causing the stalks to rocket forth in search of light without developing a fibrous toughness. By the 1880s, Yorkshire

farmers were forcing rhubarb on a grand scale, particularly around the towns of Wakefield, Leeds, and Bradford, an area known as the Rhubarb Triangle. In the years before World War II, most of the rhubarb consumed in England hailed from here; a train, laden with freshly harvested stalks and dubbed the Rhubarb Express, made daily runs from stations in the countryside to London’s Covent Garden vegetable market.

During the war, with sugar in short supply, people were forced to cook the stalks plain, and, over time, many abandoned the vegetable altogether. Today, only 12 family rhubarb farms are still in the business in the area. Within the past few years, however, the popularity of rhubarb, particularly the forced kind, has been on the rise. Recently, I paid a visit to E. Oldroyd & Sons, a rhubarb farm in West Yorkshire, one of the largest and oldest such farms in the country. As I toured a vast forcing shed containing 30,000 spindly rhubarb plants eerily lit by candles, I heard intermittent noises like that of celery snapping—the sounds of stalk buds bursting open in the darkness. Spring at last! —*Tim Hayward*

TIM HAYWARD

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KITCHENWISE



Cultural Evolution

A Chinese cook finds fresh inspiration in the vestiges of Beijing's past

BY GEORGIA FREEDMAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSH WAND

LAST SPRING, ON A warm, cloudless morning, I made my way through Beijing's historic Dongcheng district, past old men playing mah-jongg on tables outside their shops and women bicycling home from the market, their baskets full of greens and tomatoes. My destination was a small home off a narrow *hutong*, or lane, where Chunyi Zhou, a 36-year-old with a quick smile, was teaching a cooking class in her open-air kitchen. When I arrived, Zhou had gathered her three students—expatriates

from France, Belgium, and Hong Kong—around a long table set in the middle of her shady courtyard and had started to show them how to prepare the ingredients for gong bao ji ding, the classic dish known to Americans as kung pao chicken. She watched as they sliced ginger, garlic, scallions, and dried chiles and diced chicken breasts into small pieces, “the same size as the tip of your finger”.

Zhou, a former chemist from the southern city of Guangzhou whose passion for food led her to culinary school and, ultimately, to

a change of career in 2006, told me that her apartment was actually one part of a building that had once been a single-family dwelling of four rooms surrounding a central courtyard. Like many of the residences in Beijing's historic

Above, clockwise from top left: Chunyi Zhou and her students in her courtyard kitchen; Zhou slices chicken for gong bao ji ding; a ceramic pot for storing used cooking oil; Zhou's serving ware, along with a functional collection of strainers, spatulas, and other tools; the pantry; steamed fish with scallions.

hutong districts, the house had been occupied by one family for hundreds of years, until the 1950s, when governmental decrees forced multiple families to share houses like this one, eventually dividing them up into apartments. The home's original kitchen would have been an interior room adjacent to the main living area, built around a large wood- and coal-burning stove with a metal wok set into its top—a far cry from Zhou's breezy, open-air situation, which

W More photos and a recipe for steamed fish with scallions at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

bears a greater resemblance to the kitchens she was accustomed to in the south of China.

As the students prepped ingredients, I poked around the simple, utilitarian kitchen, which makes up half of her apartment's private courtyard. In one corner of the courtyard, Zhou had created an alcove with counters and wood shelves, a small sink, and a two-burner propane wok range that delivers the powerful heat needed for stir-frying. Her pantry is nothing more than a pair of folding tables, just outside the alcove, on which Zhou stores bottles of oils, vinegars, and soy sauces; plastic containers filled with dried spices like sichuan peppercorns; and jars of chile sauces and pickled vegetables. Next to them, a sturdy, three-by-six-foot wood table serves as a work surface. To provide shade and protection from rain in the summer, Zhou erected a simple "roof" of straw screens and corrugated plastic over this half of the courtyard; in the winter, she encloses the entire space in this way to keep it heated. At the other end of the courtyard, which is filled with potted flowers and plants, Zhou set a low tea table and a collection of wicker chairs, where she and her guests may eat and relax.

Like all traditional Chinese chefs, Zhou uses a minimum number of tools in her cooking, relying on an arsenal of classic cooking techniques rather than on appliances and fancy equipment to create a wide variety of shapes, flavors, and textures. Her kitchen contains only two woks, a few ladles and strainers, a rice cooker, some mixing bowls, cutting boards, and cleavers, and an assortment of plates, bowls, and utensils.

Instead of teaching her students traditional Beijing-style cuisine—which, like all northern Chinese food, was historically based on wheat, in the form of steamed buns and pancakes, and richer meats like mutton and duck—Zhou focuses on foods from Sichuan and her home state of Guangzhou, which are lighter and spicier and contain more seafood and rice. Dishes representing other regions of China have become more

and more commonplace in Beijing in the past half century, as people from all over the country have moved to the capital, bringing their traditions with them, and as the means of transporting perishable foods have improved.

The dishes Zhou's students prepared the day I visited reflected the greater range of foods from different regions available in Beijing today. Once they had prepped all their ingredients, each took a turn at the stove to make his or her own gong bao ji ding, a Sichuanese specialty, as well as a simple preparation of moist, white-fleshed butterfish steamed with ginger and strewn with scallions, a dish from Guangzhou. As the work progressed, Zhou coached her pupils, explaining how to toss the ingredients in the wok so that they would cook evenly and telling them when to add the sugar, salt, and MSG. When the dishes were finished, we took our seats around the tea table, in the shade of the pomegranate tree that grows next to the house's front gate, and Zhou explained to the students where they had gone wrong—meat cooked too slowly or a pepper cut too thick—and what they'd done right.

"I wanted to live in the *hutongs* because they are the soul of the city," Zhou said as we began to eat. Like most Beijingers, she feels that these crowded lanes and buildings, some of which date to the 13th century, preserve the traditional Beijing lifestyle. They are home to a diverse mix—longtime residents, immigrants, the newly wealthy, and elderly pensioners—all living in close quarters. "There is community here," Zhou said, describing how neighbors gather outside, share food, give unsolicited advice, and rarely knock before entering someone else's house. "In the *hutong*, you never close the door, because then the neighbors think something is wrong." (For more information about Chunyi Zhou's cooking classes, see *THE PANTRY*, page 108.)

Would you like to share your own kitchen design ideas with other SAVEUR readers? Send us photos of your kitchen, both overall and in detail, along with your name, address, and a few lines telling us what's special about it. Please note that unused submissions cannot be acknowledged or returned. Our address: Kitchenwise, SAVEUR, 15 East 32nd Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10016.

NEIGHBORHOODS OLD AND NEW

Despite their historical significance, approximately 80 percent of Beijing's *hutong* neighborhoods have been torn down over the past three decades to make way for high-rises. And those, like Dongcheng, that haven't been razed are changing dramatically, as the government and private homeowners demolish old structures and build new ones, often in an "ancient" style, that become boutiques, bars, and luxury homes, complete with modern, stainless-steel appliances, designed for foreigners and Beijing's growing upper-middle class. Throughout the *hutongs*, however, remnants of the city's past are still visible. —G.F.



When most single-family courtyard homes became multifamily buildings in the 1950s, each family was given only one room to live in. To expand their spaces, residents built bedrooms and kitchens that extended into public lanes; these ad hoc structures have since become permanent parts of *hutong* homes.



Though gas officially replaced coal fuel in Beijing homes in the 1980s (when soaring pollution from coal fires forced the government to take action), most people living in *hutongs* still use pressed-coal "honeycombs" to heat their homes. These also keep a kettle or a pot of soup simmering all day long.



Because of the high cost of living in Beijing, a great number of *hutong* residents live in small apartments with enough space for only a bed, a table, and a television. In lieu of a full, indoor kitchen, many keep a propane stove just outside their front door, where they can stir-fry their meals quickly.

When it comes to "Grana"—as firm grating cheeses are broadly known in Italy—native cooks have always savored the best, like the traditional Grana Padano, for more than sprinkling over plates of pasta. In recent years, as Grana Padano has become more widely available in the United States, Americans, too, have been catching on to the myriad charms of the cheese: they're melting it into panini, studding salads

with shards of it, and serving it on cheese plates with salumi and dried fruit.

"It's one of the world's great cheeses," says Lou Di Paolo, a purveyor and importer of Italian specialty foods, who oversees his family's historic shop, Di Paolo's Fine Foods, in Manhattan's Little Italy. Mr. Di Paolo, who flies to Italy several times a year to handpick his wheels of Grana Padano, uses a traditional spear-shaped knife to chip away chunks of the cheese

along its natural fault lines, revealing its pale gold color and releasing its fragrant, nutty aroma.

Grana Padano is the *original grana cheese* born in Italy's verdant Padana Valley, also known as the Po Valley, more than a thousand years ago; monks developed the recipe to preserve surplus milk from their cows. The term grana refers to the cheese's slightly granular texture, which is dotted with deliciously crunchy protein crystals

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that form during the ripening stage. Grana Padano contains less fat than other hard cheeses, since it's made from milk that has been skimmed of its densest cream. It is produced in a wide area that extends from Piemonte to Veneto and also includes the Piacenza province (in the Emilia-Romagna region) and Trento (in the trentino Alto-Adige region). This geographic range allows for slight variations that make each region's version special: depending on the

area where Grana Padano is produced, you'll find spicier notes or milder flavors. Regardless of origin, Grana Padano is strictly regulated by a consortium of more than 200 producers. Every wheel is branded with the date and the code of the producer.

When you're purchasing Grana Padano, it's best to buy from vendors who offer wheels at various stages of ripeness. Grana Padano that's been aged for 12 to

16 months has a creamy texture and a fresh, milky flavor. Grana Padano wheels that are aged over 16 months (a maximum of 24 months), after passing extra tests and if requested by the producer, can be branded *riserva*; this cheese has a deep flavor and is an extraordinary treat. Whichever age you decide on, Grana Padano is remarkably versatile in the kitchen, suitable for melting, grating, and, of course, nibbling on its own.



Sautéed Broccoli Rabe with Grana Padano (serves 4)

- Salt
- 2 bunches broccoli rabe (about 2 pounds), 1" of the ends trimmed
- 3 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 4 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 dried chiles de árbol, stemmed and broken into small pieces
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Generous shavings of Grana Padano

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the broccoli rabe and cook until crisp-tender, 2–3 minutes. Drain.

Combine the oil, garlic, and chiles in a large skillet; place over medium heat and cook, stirring, until fragrant and sizzling, but not browned, about 1 minute. Add the broccoli rabe and cook until hot. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Arrange on a platter, drizzle with oil, and scatter the Grana Padano over the top. Serve hot or at room temperature.

INGREDIENT

Lovely Legumes

By any name, Southern peas are comfort food of the first order

BY JOHN GROSSMANN

A FEW SMALL THINGS have changed since Lola Daniel started shelling Southern peas, also known as field peas or cowpeas, as a young girl in Ruston, Louisiana, nearly half a century ago. “Back then, we’d pick ‘em and shell ‘em sitting under the shade tree,” she says, as she helps prepare Saturday dinner at her daughter Edwina’s home in Houston, Texas, her hands moving with practiced, mechanical precision over a stainless-steel bowl that’s quickly filling up with plump peas called purple hulls—close cousins of black-eyed peas. Nowadays, when it’s time to shell a bushel of Southern peas, which Daniel, a 61-year-old urban gardener, grows on a small plot outside her Houston-area home and sells at local farmers’ markets, she’s typically in her air-conditioned living room, seated in front of a television set tuned to the Western Channel. “I’m bad on the westerns,” she says, laughing.

The basics, however, have stayed the same. Grabbing one of the sickle-shaped pods, Daniel demonstrates for this Northerner her time-honored method for hand-shelling Southern peas. Taking a single pod in her right hand, she holds it curved side down and squeezes, pressing it between thumb and forefinger (“No nails”) and sending 14 peas clattering into the bowl. “It’s like milking a cow,” she says.

There’s no mistaking the pale green, purple-flecked legumes flying from Daniel’s nimble fingers for the tiny orbs many people associate with the word *pea*. Unlike the English pea, purple hulls and their Southern brethren (*Vigna unguiculata*) are meaty and kidney shaped and, botanically speaking, aren’t peas at all; they’re beans. Indeed, Southern peas, the first varieties of which were likely brought to North America from Africa on slave ships, are close relatives

of butter beans, which are themselves often thought of as Southern peas.

If Northerners know Southern peas at all, it’s usually the black-eyed variety, the traditional New Year’s Day bearer of good luck. But venture below the Mason-Dixon Line, and a veritable mess of Southern peas awaits: purple hulls, lady creams, zipper creams, crowders, and more. Many Southerners, especially those living in East Texas and Louisiana, have a deep attachment to this food, which they slow-simmer with a ham hock or bacon for a hearty stew or serve alongside main dishes like fried chicken and meat loaf. And, increasingly, chefs across the South are using Southern peas in more-eclectic ways, mashing them into dips or frying them up in savory cakes. I’ve come to Houston for a firsthand encounter with this beloved Southern staple, which, even in these enlightened culinary times, has yet to receive its due glory in other parts of the country.

“I GREW UP EATING PEAS. I guess it’s an East Texas thing,” says Randy Evans, the 33-year-old executive chef at the acclaimed restaurant Brennan’s of Houston. He’s invited me to accompany him on a drive to Edom, Texas, 200 miles north of Houston, to pay a visit to Jimmy Walker, one of his pea suppliers. Along the way, Evans talks about cooking the local delicacy. “Some peas

take longer than others. Lady creams go fast: forty-five minutes to an hour and you’re done,” he says of that pale and particularly buttery-tasting variety. “Black-eyed and purple hulls take a bit longer.”

Growing up, Evans loved nothing more than to stare down at a plate piled high with fried chicken, Southern peas, and a crumbly hunk of corn bread served from the skillet. Evans tells me that at Brennan’s he often finishes a batch of slow-cooked lady creams or purple hulls with a bit of veal stock and butter, tapping the earthy flavor of the humble legumes to give his duck pot pie in puff pastry a bit of local character. He also pairs venison loin with a Texas field pea fricassee.

Keeping a year-round supply of fresh peas—which Evans prefers to the dried version, since the latter often cook up mushy instead of creamy—requires diligence. He makes several pea reconnaissance missions a year and always keeps his eyes peeled for farm stands when he’s traveling around the region in the late spring and early summer, when the legumes are in season. The peas he doesn’t use right away are quickly frozen. Fresh peas stored that way will keep well for months, he says.

Over the years, Evans has learned the value of buying more than he’ll need. Today’s excursion is a case in point. When we arrive at Edom Marketplace, the small restaurant that

METHOD

Randy Evans’s Southern Peas

For this recipe, given to us by Randy Evans, the executive chef at Brennan’s of Houston, Southern peas are simmered with a ham hock, carrot, celery, and chopped onions to add a sweet and smoky back note. In a 4-quart saucepan, heat 1 tbsp. olive oil over medium-high heat. Add 1 small finely chopped onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent, about 10 minutes. Cut 1 rib of celery in half and do the same with a carrot; add both to the pan along with 2 cups fresh or frozen Southern peas (such as zipper creams, black-eyed, or butter beans), 2½ cups chicken stock, and 1 small smoked ham hock. Bring to a boil, lower heat to medium, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until tender and creamy, about 1 hour. (The time depends on the type and size of the peas.) Remove ham hock, slice meat from bone, and chop; return meat to pan. Season peas with kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. Serves 4.

JOHN GROSSMANN has written for the New York Times Magazine, Gastronomica, and other publications.



INGREDIENT

the supplier Jimmy Walker recently opened on Edom's one-stoplight main street, Walker informs us that heavy rains have delayed this year's pea crop. The peas on today's menu are elegant, white elite creams taken from Walker's own, dwindling frozen stash. Walker's wife, Laura, cooks them with bacon, salt and pepper,

W A recipe for corn bread at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

a sprinkling of sugar, and butter to enrich their

delicate flavor. When I taste my first spoonful, which is heady with the aroma of the pot liquor the peas are served in, Walker gives a satisfied nod and says, "Yessir, there you go."

Conversation soon turns to the vicissitudes of pea farming. "The deer love cream peas," Walker remarks. "They'll walk over purple hulls and black-eyed peas to get to these creamers." A bigger problem is the scarcity of seasonal labor, due to tightened border restrictions. In years past, Walker has harvested as many as 400 acres of

peas. This year, he dared not devote half that much acreage to the crop.

IN LIGHT OF THE CHALLENGES faced by farmers like Walker, gardeners such as Lola Daniel are especially welcome at Houston's Tuesday and Saturday farmers' markets. On the Saturday morning before the dinner at her daughter's house, I find Daniel in her stall at the Midtown Farmers Market, which occupies a parking lot in front of T'afia, chef Monica Pope's celebrated seasonal-American restaurant. Perched before a bounty of black-eyed, lady creams, brown crowders, and purple hulls, Daniel busies herself tending to a steady stream of customers, including Pope.

"I tell people, You gotta get those peas," says the 45-year-old restaurateur. "They're so good." In pea season, Pope makes a hugely popular dish that consists of fiddlehead ferns, baby artichokes, and Daniel's purple hulls

or black-eyed napped in herb butter.

That evening, at Edwina's house, Daniel's sister Doris prepares two big pots for the peas, adding smoked turkey wings, tasso, and ham hocks. "We'll start with water and add chicken broth later," she says. My eyes grow wide as a Texas-size feast takes shape before me. In good time, the kitchen counter disappears under a huge array of readied dishes, including sweet potatoes, stewed okra, and fried chicken. I judiciously serve myself small portions of everything, managing a slightly bigger helping of the tender purple hulls cooked with the ham and tasso. On the second go-round, though, I drop all pretense. I fill my plate entirely with peas, with a chicken wing as garnish, knowing that I'll be leaving such home-cooked versions of this regional delight behind when I head back North. 

THE PANTRY, page 108: A source for fresh-frozen Southern peas.

Our Favorite Southern Peas

The legumes known variously as Southern peas, cowpeas, and field peas all belong to the genus *Vigna unguiculata*, though closely related legumes such as butter beans are often considered to be, in gastronomic terms, part of the same family. There are dozens of subvarieties, but we're especially fond of the five shown here, for their versatility and distinctive appearance and flavors. The zipper cream **1**, invented by a Florida agronomist in 1972, is actually a cross between a crowder pea and a cream pea (see below); the variety gets its name from the fact that the peas can be whisked from their hull in a zipping motion. Though not in the same genus

as Southern peas, butter beans **2** exhibit a similarly luscious texture and taste and are often lumped into the Southern-peas category; we like the speckled variety shown below. The light-hued, unblemished surface of cream peas **3** accounts for the name, though the moniker is often attributed to the cooked peas' butter-soft texture. The pink-eyed purple hull **4** has a mottled hull and a red spot at the center of each pea. Crowders **5** have a squarish shape, a result of their being densely packed inside the hull (hence the name); brown crowders (shown), which have a deep, earthy flavor, are the most prevalent in the South. —Ben Mims



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LIVES

Gator Man

In the marshes and flatlands of central Florida, old ways die hard

BY MARIA FINN

ON HIS 65TH BIRTHDAY, John Tanner was going mano a mano with an outraged, feral razorback hog in an abandoned orange grove. With the scent of half-rotted fruit hanging in the humid air, the hog thrashed around inside a metal trap that Tanner had baited. "Get ready to jump and get up a tree if he gets away," he shouted at me, as he reached into the trap with a length of rope.

After a grunting, sweating, swearing tangle that pitted bristles and sharp teeth against chapped hands, the boar was finally roped and hoisted into a cage secured to the bed of Tanner's pickup truck. "Now I've got to feed him good grain," said Tanner, his sturdy frame none the worse for the wear. "Then you're looking at some fine barbecued pork."

The land on which Tanner traps is part of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, 140,000 acres of coastal estuaries, dunes, and scrub oak and pine in the shadow of the John F. Kennedy Space Center, in central Florida. Local hunters and trappers like Tanner are allowed to cull the wild pigs, which proliferate in the area. Tanner, whose great-great-grandfather came to Florida from Georgia as an army scout in the mid-1800s, just after the Second Seminole War, comes from a long line of Florida Crackers.

At the term *cracker*, outsiders often wince, believing that it refers to a racist or that it's a put-down equivalent of "poor white people". Hayley Downs, a documentary-film maker I know who is from central Florida, explained to me a while ago what a Florida Cracker really is: "It's a person who lives off the land, survives in the Florida wilderness, and stretches—or ignores—the law to fit their life." Downs's own grandfather was a Cracker who hunted in the Everglades and sold what he caught to make a living; he was considered a poacher, but to him it was just getting

dinner. And Downs's father, Albert, who also hunted and fished the scrublands and wetlands of central Florida, was a Cracker too, though he had a day job. He also founded the Albert D. Downs Wild Game Feast, held each May for the past 16 years in DeLand, Florida, to help keep the Florida Cracker tradition alive; rattlesnake, wild turkey, alligator, wild pig, and frogs' legs are regular features on the feast's menu.



John Tanner, with the cage he uses for transporting the wild hogs and alligators he traps.

Crackers, many of whom are the descendants of the region's pioneer settlers, could be called the last gasp of old rural Florida. There are still pockets of them scattered throughout the state—near the central towns of DeLand and Christmas and even as far south as Homestead—but as suburban sprawl in booming cities like Orlando swallows up formerly rural communities and the surrounding wildlands, more and more Cracker families have packed up and left for Alabama and Georgia, where development is less rampant.

In many places, the only thing that remains of Cracker culture is the cooking. Thanks to food festivals like the Wild Game Feast and to restaurateurs interested in local foodways, "Cracker food", a homegrown mix of classic Southern dishes, wild game, and tropical fruits, has been inherited by a generation of Floridians who drive to a desk job every day instead of heading into the swamps and flatlands to catch frogs and trap hogs.

WHEN HAYLEY DOWNS first told me about John Tanner, she called him the Gator Man. I pondered the nickname as Tanner and I rode in his pickup later that afternoon alongside rows of overgrown orange trees—vestiges of abandoned groves, some of which date to Spanish-colonial times—scattering the occasional family of feral hogs ahead of us. When we passed through a particularly dense stand of trees, we startled a bobcat, which took off sprinting down the path. Moments later, an armadillo (called "possum on the half shell" by locals) scurried by. When we reached the bank of a canal, Tanner stopped the truck and we got out. He cupped his hands to his mouth and made a noise that sounded like a cross between a dog's whimper and a bullfrog's croak. We waited. After a minute or two, I could make out the shape of an alligator cutting through the still, green water. After a while, the animal stopped at the bank, floating as still as a log, its doll's eyes fixed on us. "This gator's a male," Tanner said. "He was wondering if I was going to mate with him."

Tanner, who raises cattle for a living and also sells meat from the hogs he traps, is

MARIA FINN edited the travel anthologies *Cuba in Mind* (Vintage, 2004) and *Mexico in Mind* (Vintage, 2006). This is her first article for SAVEUR.

LIVES

contracted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to catch “nuisance” alligators; as development explodes in Florida, more and more people are finding the reptiles lolling in their swimming pools or resting under their cars. Having grown up hunting and trapping in the marshes and woods near the town of Christmas, where he still lives, Tanner knows how to tie gators; he learned when he was a kid. He explained his method as the gator swam closer: “First I cover its eyes; then I tape its mouth shut; then I strap its arms and legs behind its back. And I tie a half hitch in the tail so it can’t hit me with that.”

To my relief, no wrestling took place that afternoon; Tanner was just paying this gator a visit. “I like to be out here in nature,” he said. “I learn about the animals, and they learn about me.”

Hunting, trapping, fishing, and small-scale farming have long been the traditional pursuits of Crackers, some of whom have traced their family lineage in Florida to the 1700s. Many Florida Crackers claim

Scottish-Irish descent, and some believe that their name has Gaelic or Celtic roots. In the English writer and lexicographer Samuel Johnson’s famous *Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, the word *cracker* is said to denote a noisy, boasting fellow. But many historians and Crackers themselves think the word comes from the noise made by the cracking of a cow whip, cattle herding having long been a common means of livelihood in Florida. Still others attribute the name to the term *corn-cracker*, a reference to the crop that has traditionally served as Crackers’ staple food.

Not surprisingly, Florida’s native fauna feature prominently in Cracker dishes: stewed softshell turtle, fried frogs’ legs, broiled rattlesnake, deep-fried armadillo, and so on. The meat of alligators, which may be legally hunted on a limited basis in Florida, wasn’t eaten by Crackers in the old days, when the reptiles were killed only for their hides, but now farm-raised and wild alligator meat is found on “Cracker platters” at roadside restaurants and community cookouts

across the state. Much of Cracker food is fried and emphatically Southern in character, but many dishes incorporate tropical fruits—sour orange pie, grilled pork served with guava and sweet onion sauce, baked grapefruit, orange fritters, and biscuits with guava butter, to name a few.

THE DAY AFTER OUR encounter with the hog and the alligator, Tanner invited me to accompany him to some nearby pastureland to cut swamp cabbage—the crunchy inner core, or “heart”, of young sabal palmetto, a favorite food of Crackers—for the Old Timers Picnic, an event, held the second weekend in May, that he organizes every year in his hometown. Usually, Crackers slow-cook swamp cabbage with cured pork for a deeply flavored stew, though the crunchy, tart-tasting raw hearts are also sometimes sliced thin and made into salad.

Tanner and I drove to the grazing grounds, near the headwaters of the St. Johns River, that Tanner leases for his 600 head of cattle. A few of his steer could be seen browsing

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LIVES

the stretches of wiregrass dotted with scrub pine and sabal palmetto, which can be harvested in limited quantities on some public and private lands in Florida. (It also happens to be the state tree.) “The cabbage from the palmettos near the pine trees is too tannic,” he explained. “You’ve got to find ones out in the open.”

I could hear the whine of chain saws and the crack of splintering wood in the near distance—the sounds of swamp cabbage being harvested by friends of Tanner’s who were also planning to attend the Old Timers Picnic. In the old days, an ax was the tool of choice, Tanner told me, but either way, the method is the same. Using his own saw, he showed me how the first cut is made, three to four feet above the base of the trunk. The second cut is made just beneath the fronds. The resulting segment contains the tree’s edible core and is referred to as the “boot”, the outer layers of which are left intact to protect the delicate flesh until it’s ready to be used. Once the heart’s outer husk is peeled away, you get

a tender cylinder about four inches across and three feet long.

“When I grew up, 70 percent of our food was subsistence,” Tanner said, as he deftly worked the saw. “Now it’s closer to 50 percent. It’s just too easy to go to the grocery store these days.”

On the day of the picnic, which draws thousands of people from all over the country and is held in the town park, Tanner and I arrived early to help set up. I recognized a few of the other men who’d been cutting with us a few days earlier. A few of them had brought portable barbecue cookers. Soon, the air was filled with wood smoke, as chickens and racks of pork ribs began cooking. I watched as Tanner worked his knife around the edge of the palmetto hearts he’d harvested, removing the parts he knew to be tough or bitter and dropping the trimmed pieces into a vat of water, to let the swamp cabbage soak and lose some of its tannic acid. A short while later, Tanner took his vat to a cooking area, where a few of his friends added bacon and

salt and pepper and started the cabbage simmering.

Later, after Tanner had helped the bluegrass band set up and had served sweet tea to a few of the oldest old-timers—the picnic’s most honored guests—he brought me a heaping plate of barbecued chicken and ribs, accompanied by biscuits and stewed swamp cabbage, which had a smoky-sweet

W *A recipe for swamp cabbage, and information on Florida Cracker food events, at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111*

taste that reminded me of German potato salad’s. As I ate, I listened to people share stories about a past that seemed to be fading a little more every day, and I thought of an analogy my friend Hayley Downs had related to me when I’d asked her for a recipe for swamp cabbage. “Actually, swamp cabbage is a good metaphor for Florida Crackers,” she’d said. “It’s a secret passed down from earlier generations. The heart is hidden, and only those who have learned from past generations know how to cut it right.”



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REPORTER

Shape Shifters

Will food science change the silhouettes of our fruits and vegetables?

BY FREDERICK KAUFMAN

I DO NOT REMEMBER the canned goods or the freezer cases in the supermarkets of my youth as much as I remember the produce section. On one occasion, I recall, I stared in rapture at row upon row of lustrous, bright orange tangerines, each sphere a perfect replica of the next. The uniformity of the fruit gratified my eight-year-old eyes, and, at my urging, Mom bought some to take home. They were decent-enough specimens, but, as it turned out, I didn't enjoy eating them nearly so much as I'd liked looking at them.

In the years since, I've come to understand the subtle tricks of the grocer's trade and have found out that the American produce industry shares my interest in contour,

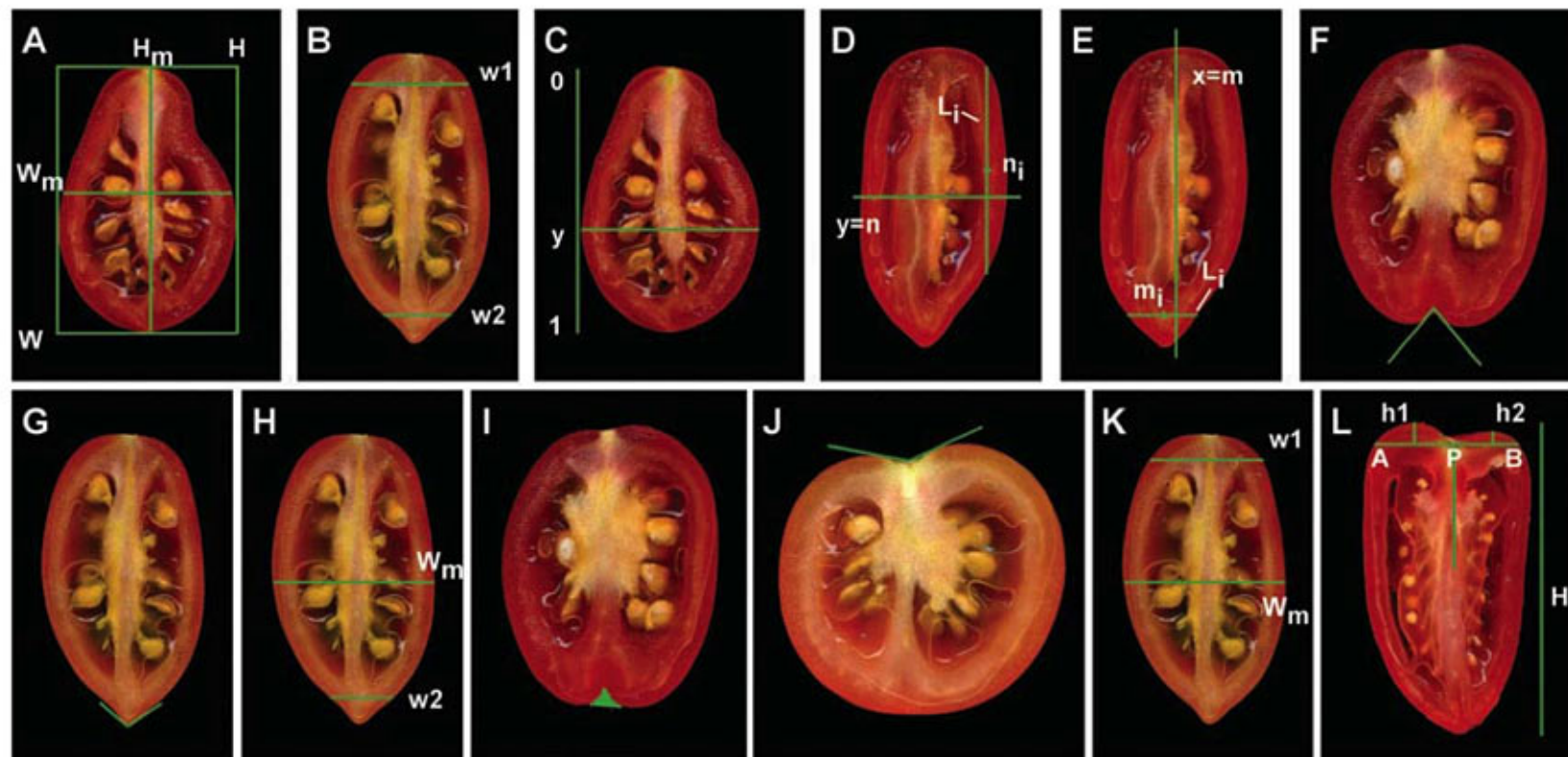
color, and pattern. As a journalist, I learned that produce sellers have long banked on the often contested but widely held assumption that food shoppers incline toward symmetry and regularity of shape and appearance. Accordingly, farmers, distributors, and retailers in this country have developed myriad methods for making sure that the size and shape of the fruits and vegetables they sell are as close as possible to what consumers are thought to deem ideal.

It's no secret, for example, that cross-breeding and grafting have been the industry's methods of choice for molding produce into sameness, creating shapely hybrids that have played a part in pushing many older, more irregular-looking heirloom varieties off most

supermarket shelves.

What's more, before many supermarket apples, potatoes, and other items hit the produce racks at American grocery stores, they must pass muster at regional packing houses, where they're sent toppling past multilane batteries of digital cameras linked to computers that instruct the machines to sort by size, curvature, and color. Only the most unblemished and uniform-looking survivors of such beauty pageants graduate to the shelves, while the rest must settle for

FREDERICK KAUFMAN is the author of *A Short History of the American Stomach* (Harcourt, 2008). This is his first article for SAVEUR.



Tomato cross sections as captured by Tomato Analyzer, a software program invented by a team of Ohio State University plant geneticists and computer scientists; each frame depicts a different fruit-morphology trait. Data generated by Tomato Analyzer are being used to help identify and isolate shape-determinant DNA.

REPORTER

juice boxes, jam jars, feed troughs, and all manner of processing and recombination. Packers then coat their supermodels in water-soluble shellacs and protective waxes before sending the product on to grocers, who align their fruits and vegetables in aesthetically appealing arrangements.

Though I've become accustomed to the reality of produce aisles packed with nearly identical apples and bananas, such displays can still have a hypnotic effect on me. But I didn't realize how far crop science had advanced in the quest for perfect-looking produce until I happened to be flipping recently through a science journal called *Plant Physiology* and came across an arresting series of photographs. The images depicted sliced whole tomatoes superimposed on a background of Cartesian coordinates garnished with equations.

I paged back and began to read the article: in a breakthrough in genetic modification—a technique that scientists have already used, to much public outcry, in the development of hardier hybrids of corn, cotton, canola, and soybeans—plant geneticists and computer scientists had begun to isolate the groups of genes that control such factors as elongation, constriction, and blockiness in certain types of fruits and vegetables. Imaging software and molecular manipulation had enabled these researchers to experiment with the cultivation of custom-shaped produce.

What did this mean? In lay terms, it meant that the gradual decoding of various strands of shape-determinant DNA could not only give us seemingly faultless oranges and peaches but also transform our notions of what fruits and vegetables were “supposed” to look like. Packing giants like Dole and Del Monte would surely relish the prospect of square grapefruits and rectangular cherry tomatoes, all the better suited for sitting on conveyor belts and fitting into shipping boxes. And the genetic key to cylindrical, slice-ready tomatoes would no doubt interest the owners of hamburger joints everywhere. The manipulation of shape-controlling DNA would have no effect on flavor—which has itself been the object of seemingly endless experimentation—but I could easily envisage how custom-shaped designer produce, if marketed with enough sophistication, might seduce many supermarket shoppers away from the

real thing. How close, I wondered, had this new scientific discipline come to making such fantasies of idealized food real? And could this advance definitively spell an end to bumpy, blotched, lopsided—and, ultimately, unique-looking—fruits and vegetables?

ESTHER VAN DER KNAAP, a 42-year-old assistant professor of horticulture and crop science at Ohio State University, is one of the leading innovators in the emerging science of fruit morphology, as her specialized field has come to be called (notwithstanding that vegetables are also the subject of her research). She and a team of seven assistants conduct their work in a group of low-slung brick buildings and greenhouses at a horticulture and crop science research and development center in Wooster, Ohio.

On the day I met van der Knaap, she wore blue jeans and clogs and was seated before a computer screen in her laboratory. I pulled up a chair, as she explained a proprietary software program called Tomato Analyzer. This application, invented by van der Knaap's team, can exhaustively calculate and catalogue the shape characteristics of any tomato on Earth—and also works perfectly well on strawberries, cherries, potatoes, and any other fruit or vegetable that can be sliced into cross sections.

Professor van der Knaap does most of her research on tomatoes, partly because they come in a relatively wide range of shapes and sizes, but today she happened to be working with a green bell pepper. She sliced the pepper lengthwise, laid one of the halves on a flatbed scanner, and watched as the outlines of the specimen emerged on the monitor.

She pointed to the upper portion of the pepper's silhouette, which tapered to a double point. “There's a little shape I find interesting,” she said. “Really cute. I'd like to know what controls that.”

Over the past several years, Tomato Analyzer has helped van der Knaap and her colleagues understand the shape variation caused by at least two fruit-shape genes: one of them, a strand of DNA they named *Ovate*, controls the expansion and constriction that create a pear shape; the other, called *Sun*, appears to determine elongation. Van der Knaap plans to extract a strand of *Sun* DNA from one of her tomatoes and transfer it to the leaf and root cells of an eggplant. To what end? “I'm ex-

pecting a more elongated eggplant,” she said.

“We do this research into tomatoes,” she continued, “but the goal is to understand shape diversity in other species. The more we know about the basic mechanism, the more we can apply it to just about anything.”

At that point I couldn't resist sharing my science fiction visions of square grapefruits and cylindrical tomatoes. Were such things possible?

“They're possible, yes,” said van der Knaap. “The shapes are already out there. This can happen in nature; I just make it go a lot faster.”

The aim of the current phase of van der Knaap's research is essentially to find out which genes yield certain shapes; the potential marketplace applications of her discoveries—as merely novelties for the retail sector, say, or produce customized specifically for the benefit of large-scale packers and distributors—remain to be seen. Still, van der Knaap told me, “there's definitely industry interest in these genes. Shape really helps to sell a new product and create a niche market.”

She offered a couple of examples. “Watermelons are too huge for families these days. I would think there would be a market for very small watermelons, a cute little watermelon for a small family.” Or take heirloom tomatoes, she said: “They're very disease susceptible. I could create a disease-resistant tomato with the shape and size features of an heirloom.”

Ohio State University has already applied for a patent for *Sun* DNA and may follow the lead of other horticulture institutes, including ones at the University of Nebraska, Cornell University, and the University of Hawaii, that have established relationships with major agricultural companies in the development of genetically engineered products. For now, however, the results of many of the OSU team's experiments have yet to be fully revealed.

Does van der Knaap stand to profit personally from the possible commercial applications of her work? “I would get some money,” she said. “I'm the inventor.”

LATER THAT DAY, as Professor van der Knaap led me from her lab station to one of her high-tech hothouses, I pondered anew the questions that had vexed me when I began reading about her work: Can the sub-



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lime attractions of a teardrop-shaped strawberry or a plump, round apricot really be reduced to an algorithm? Can our notions of aesthetic perfection be scientifically formulated? Before visiting van der Knaap, I'd put those questions to Carolyn Korsmeyer, a philosophy professor at the State University of New York. "It is a limited aesthetic tradition that assumed that the perfect is better than the imperfect," she told me. "I think if one is focused only on creating the perfect fruit or vegetable, the tendency is to take the aesthetic value, the look of the thing, out of context. One of the contingencies of making meals is that you're not in control of everything. Why would we want to control these things?"

I'd asked myself the same question. My childlike wonder at those tangerines notwithstanding, what could be more beautiful than a gloriously imperfect tomato?

AND YET, IN SOME WAYS, researchers like Professor van der Knaap appear to be taking great pains to eliminate those imperfections. As she guided me through the greenhouse, the building rumbled and buzzed and hissed with seemingly singular purpose; huge fans and industrial lights hovered above concrete floors spiderwebbed with plastic irrigation tubing. Near the entrance to the glass building, across from a wall-mounted pH

An interview with author Frederick Kaufman at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

monitor and an emergency shower and eye-washing station, loomed a tremendous steel door, reinforced by 20 steel bars. The door hung ajar on its hinges, revealing the insides of an iron vault that could have passed for a medieval torture chamber had it not been plastered with bright red warning signs.

"That is an autoclave," said van der Knaap. The apparatus, she explained, functions as the ultimate kitchen garbage disposal, the final resting place for much of the genetically modified plant matter generated by the professor's experiments. Once you've persuaded a fruit's DNA to zig where it formerly zagged, you may not simply send the results to the local dump. After the scientific value of the experimental fruits and vegetables has been exhausted, the DNA-altered organic material

is usually vaporized to oblivion, lest a new cultivar accidentally escape and become an invasive weed. Sure enough, just outside the autoclave a large wagonload of mud, flecked with plant cuttings, awaited its fate. "The soil must be steamed," van der Knaap said, "to sterilize it."

Beyond the autoclave lay numerous other greenhouses, each separated from the rest by internal glass walls and fronted by an aluminum sliding door stenciled with a number. Van der Knaap led me to the entrance of one of the rooms and pointed to rows of tobacco plants, the leaf cells of which had been infused with tomato DNA. I asked for a closer look, but Professor van der Knaap ushered me onward, explaining that those specimens were susceptible to contamination from an insect-borne virus that might be carried in from other parts of the facility. The slightest infestation, she cautioned, could set that particular shape-gene research back by months or years.

Van der Knaap did allow me to enter one room, where, she said, some of her genetically modified tomato plants had started to grow. As she slid open the door, the old childish excitement began to well up inside me. My mind suddenly filled with images of brave new custom-hewn fruit. But when we got inside there were no tomatoes to be seen—just spindly vines that had yet to yield fruit.

I couldn't hide my disappointment. Clearly, whatever the successes van der Knaap had achieved in customizing fruit shape, an outsider like me wasn't going to see them anytime soon. My visions of flawlessly symmetrical or outlandishly shaped fruit, daydreams born of those supermarket tangerines of my childhood, would continue to be unrealized, and the future of fruit shape remained a mystery.

Still, part of me wanted to believe that humans, after 10,000 years of selecting and hybridizing weeds into commodity crops in pursuit of hardier, tastier, and prettier fruits and vegetables, may indeed be standing on a threshold.

I asked the professor what kind of DNA she was trying to isolate in this room.

"A shape gene," she said coyly.

"What shape?"

Van der Knaap looked at me, paused, and smiled. "I'm not going to tell you." 

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Oh, Fudge

Baltimore's Berger cookies are all about excess

BY IRENE SAX

IDIDN'T GROW UP WITH Berger cookies; I married into them. Before my Baltimore-born husband introduced me to these cakelike confections slathered with fudge, I'd always considered the two-tone black-and-white cookies sold in the corner delis of my native New York City to be the height of cookie extravagance. But a plain old black-and-white is downright dainty when compared with its Baltimore relative, which consists of a round of vanilla cake messily coiffed with chocolate fudge. As far as my husband is concerned, Berger cookies are as much a part of Baltimore's culinary heritage as are steamed crabs and Old Bay seasoning. He claims to have eaten 12 of them in a single sitting when he was a teenager.

Berger cookies were created by the brothers Henry and George Berger, who are believed to have brought the recipe to Baltimore when they emigrated from Germany in 1835. No one has definitively confirmed the cookies' ancestry in Germany, but a strong case can be made that both Berger cookies and black-and-whites have the same progenitor: the *amerikaner*, a crumbly vanilla-flavored cookie topped with a thin layer of vanilla or chocolate icing. (According to many sources, the name is not a salute to Americans but, more prosaically, a German bastardization of *Ammoniakaner*, which refers to ammonium hydrogen carbonate, a once common leavening ingredient.) The Berger brothers and their sons sold their cookies at stalls in public markets around Baltimore, where they quickly became a local favorite. Charles E. Russell, an employee of the Berbers, took over the business in the early 20th century, and his family ran it until 1969, when it sold the operation to its former employees Charles DeBaufre and his brother Benjamin. DeBaufre Bakeries, now owned by Charles DeBaufre Jr., continues to make the hand-frosted cookies today, selling them to grocery and convenience stores all over Baltimore and across Maryland.

Like many homesick Baltimore exiles, my husband regularly orders a package to be delivered to our Manhattan apartment. After we eat a couple out of the box, the rest go into the freezer, where they become semihard, fudgy treats.

Berger cookies are sold in packages of 15 ounces (approximately ten cookies) for \$4.75 and in decorative one- and two-pound tins for \$13.99 and \$18.99, respectively. To order, call 800/398-2236 or visit www.bergercookies.com.



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CLASSIC

Flash in the Pan

Saltimbocca lends itself to experimentation, but the Roman original endures

BY BETH KRACKLAUER

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH saltimbocca was at an old-school Italian-American restaurant my parents used to take me to in Pittsburgh during the 1970s. I remember the dish as a plump roll of breaded and fried chicken cutlets stuffed with ham and mozzarella. At the time, the dish struck me as a grown-up thing to order, but it also fell well within my comfort zone: it was effectively the same, decadent offering I'd relished in other restaurants under the aliases chicken cordon bleu and chicken kiev.

I learned later that the saltimbocca I'd loved was a very distant cousin of the elegant Roman original, an elemental composition that is at once lighter and more satisfying. In

a preparation that takes only minutes to assemble and even less time to devour (*saltimbocca* translates literally as "jump in the mouth"), veal cutlets are pounded thin into scaloppine, topped with sage leaves, covered with thin slices of prosciutto or pancetta, sometimes dredged in flour, and pan-fried until they're crisp. Served with a simple sauce made by deglazing the pan with a slightly acidic liquid—white wine, say, or marsala—the dish achieves an overall effect that is slightly salty, slightly woodsy, and entirely sumptuous. It's no wonder that it is served in practically every trattoria in Rome.

Retracing the trajectory from saltimbocca alla romana to saltimbocca alla Pittsburgh is tricky, since the origin of the Italian dish is itself hard to pinpoint. Most sources suggest that it was born sometime in the late 19th century. One of the earliest printed recipes for it—in *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (*The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well*), written by the famous gastronome Pellegrino Artusi in 1891—identifies the dish as a Roman specialty, as it is generally acknowledged to be in most parts of the world. But in the American edition of the classic cookbook *Great Italian Cooking* (Abradale Press, 1968), the influential chef and food writer Luigi Carnacina claimed that saltimbocca actually originated in Brescia, a city in the northern province of Lombardy. Though Carnacina (a Roman, no less) offered no proof, and despite the fact that Brescian cooks I talked to seemed surprised at the theory, other writers have perpetuated his assertion for decades. I asked the Italian food writer Roberta Corradin, a longtime resident of Rome, how Romans would respond to the suggestion that saltimbocca is Brescian. "First, they would laugh at you," she said. "And if you insisted, they would get cross."

Carnacina may have been confusing saltimbocca with the common northern Italian dish known as uccellini scappati, "little escaped birds," which consists of pieces of veal or pork threaded onto skewers along with pancetta and sage leaves. In fact, as I began to hunt for saltimbocca recipes, I found many dishes that seemed designed with the same goal in mind: to give lean, mild-tasting meat more flavor and texture by adding sage and cured pork. I also discovered numerous regional variations on traditional saltimbocca: in Sorrento, a city in the southwestern region of Campania, for example, cooks add a layer of mozzarella under the prosciutto; in



CLASSIC

SALTIMBOCCA ALLA ROMANA



1 Using a meat mallet, pound eight 2-oz. veal cutlets (preferably from the veal top round), one at a time, between 2 sheets of plastic wrap until each piece is about $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick. Lightly season with kosher salt (little is needed, as prosciutto is salty) and freshly ground pepper, to taste.



2 Lay 2 to 3 thin slices of prosciutto atop each piece of veal, gently pressing prosciutto against veal to adhere. Place 2 sage leaves on top of the prosciutto and stitch them into the veal with a toothpick. Place $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour on a large plate. Dredge each piece of veal in flour, shake off any excess, and set aside.



3 Heat 2 tbsp. olive oil and 2 tbsp. unsalted butter in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add half the meat and cook, turning once, until prosciutto side is crisp and the veal side is lightly browned, about 1 minute per side. Transfer the meat to a paper towel-lined plate. Repeat with more olive oil, butter, and remaining meat. Remove and discard the toothpicks.



4 Drain and discard the oil and butter from the skillet; place over high heat. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup marsala; cook, scraping up browned bits, until reduced by half, 1–2 minutes. Add 1 cup chicken stock; reduce by half, about 3 minutes. Stir in 4 tbsp. unsalted butter; reduce heat to medium. Return meat to pan; cook, turning occasionally, until sauce thickens slightly, 1–2 minutes. Serves 4.

other places, fish, chicken, or pork forms the foundation of the dish. While purists insist that a proper saltimbocca alla romana should be cooked and served flat, other reputable sources, including the iconic cookbook *Il cucchiaino d'argento* (*The Silver Spoon*), published in Italy in 1950, calls for rolling the saltimbocca into a tidy bundle, bringing it closer to the genre of Italian dishes called involtini, which consist of rolled meats stuffed with various ingredients, from bread crumbs to herbs. This rolled style seems to be the progenitor of the version I knew from Pittsburgh, while the flat version, after emigrating to the States, joined a battery of quick, robust sautéed dishes, like veal piccata and chicken marsala, that were staples of midcentury white-tablecloth restaurants. They endure today, even in new-breed Italian spots like Al di Là, a celebrated restaurant in Brooklyn, New York, that has offered saltimbocca (a classic take, except that it's made with pork) since the restaurant opened, in 1998. "From a cook's perspective, it's a very fast pickup," explains the chef and co-owner, Anna Klinger. "I love the simplicity and the deep flavor one gets from just a few ingredients."

When I began experimenting with saltimbocca, I learned a number of interesting things. Consistently, prosciutto delivered more flavor than pancetta, which some sources cited as the dish's original adornment. Veal always yielded a fuller-tasting dish than chicken. The way the saltimbocca is built also matters: covering the outside of the cutlets with prosciutto, rather than rolling cutlets with the ham inside, produced a better texture and deeper browning, distinguished by crisp, salty ruffles of prosciutto. The flavor of the sage came through the best in recipes that called for adding the herb to the sauce, rather than layering it between the prosciutto and the veal. Some recipes call for dredging the meat in flour before pan-frying, and I can see why: the flour creates a velvety surface on the meat that browns beautifully and, when the cutlets are returned to the pan before they're served, adds richness and body to the sauce. And even though deglazing with white wine introduced a pleasant acidity, I preferred the sweeter, rounder taste of marsala.

The recipe that I ultimately picked as my favorite was based on one in *SAVEUR* consulting editor Lidia Bastianich's book *Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen* (Knopf, 2001). The recipe's only nod to innovation is its suggestion that the saltimbocca be served with spinach, a plating style common in the United States but unheard of in Rome, where contorni (side dishes) are typically served separately. Bastianich's interpretation incorporates all the best elements of the dish discussed above, along with the nifty trick of attaching the whole sage leaves with toothpicks to the outside of the prosciutto, which allows the herb to release its aromatic oils into the pan while preserving its appearance. Of course, Bastianich's is only one among many subtle adaptations of the classic saltimbocca recipe that have emerged over the years, but it's this graceful gesture that, to me, makes this version so appealing. It's a reminder that even the most enduring classics can surprise us from time to time.



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Big Bites of Summer Bliss

Dining outdoors is truly one of the greatest pleasures life offers. It's the epitome of summer: unwinding with a plate of tasty foods straight off the grill and a glass of wine in the low light of dusk. All that's needed for a romantic evening amid balmy breezes is the right ingredients: a grill, sumptuous foods, a good bottle of wine, and family and friends.





GO AHEAD AND LET YOUR LOVE FLOW. FIND YOUR HAPPY PLACE. AND JUST BE.



Get the Grill Going

Gas or charcoal? Large or small? Sleekly functional or amply accessorized? Selecting a perfect grill is the first step toward enjoying warm-weather entertaining. Gas grills heat up rapidly, so they're a great choice for quick cooking on week-day evenings. Steaks, sausages, fish, and vegetables grill up on them in no time and with very little fuss. Charcoal grilling, on the other hand, takes a bit longer but is well worth the time. Charcoal gives grilled and barbecued foods their signature aroma, a scent that for many is the quintessence of summer.

Some of the latest grill models can be used for much more than simple grilling. The Weber Summit® S-670™, for example, features the Weber Sear Station™, which reaches temperatures of 800 to 900 degrees Fahrenheit. With a total cooking area of 838 square inches that includes six stainless-steel burners, as well as a smoker, a rotisserie burner, and a 60,000 BTU per hour input, the Summit is the king of outdoor cooking.

Compact grills are ideal for grilling in an

outdoor space. Weber's Go-Anywhere® and Smokey Joe® are compact models for both charcoal- and gas-fueled grilling. They are also portable, so they may be taken to the park or the beach and make for perfect secondary grills.

An outdoor fireplace provides the atmosphere of a campfire in the comfort of a backyard. The Weber® Flame™ Fireplace is a natural gas hearth that comes complete with lava rocks. On a cool summer evening, turn it on in an instant, sit back, and enjoy.

Craft the Perfect Meal

Fine grills demand exquisite menus. Steaks are ideal for simple entertaining, for family lunches, and for impromptu gatherings with friends. Season them simply, then dress them with a chimichurri sauce or just a squeeze of lemon juice. Pair pre-marinated steaks, such as Allen Brothers' teriyaki-marinated skirt steaks, with a salad of roasted fresh corn, red onions, and basil or with juicy tomatoes, sliced and drizzled with a bit of olive oil and a dusting of coarse sea salt.

THE AROMA OF GRILLED FOODS IS THE FIRST SIGN OF SUMMER.



RIB-EYE STEAKS WITH TOMATO HARISSA

SERVES 4

Prep time: 20 minutes

Grilling time: 18–23 minutes

For the sauce:

- 1 large red bell pepper
- 1 tsp. coriander seed
- 1 tsp. mustard seed
- 1 tsp. cumin seed
- 1 medium garlic clove
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup tightly packed fresh mint leaves
- 2 tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp. ground cayenne pepper

- 4 rib-eye steaks, 8–10 oz. each and 1 inch thick
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- 3/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1. To make the sauce: Grill the bell pepper over Direct Medium heat until it is blackened and blistered all over, 12–15 minutes, turning occasionally. Place the pepper in a small bowl and cover with plastic wrap to trap the steam. Set aside to let rest for at least 10 minutes, then peel the skin from the pepper, discard the stem and seeds, and roughly chop the pepper.

2. In a small skillet over medium heat, toast the coriander, mustard, and cumin seeds until the aromas of the spices are apparent, 3–5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pulverize the spices in a spice or coffee grinder. In a food processor, finely chop the garlic. Add the chopped bell peppers, pulverized spices, and remaining sauce ingredients. Process until completely smooth.

3. Allow the steaks to stand at room temperature for 20–30 minutes before grilling. Lightly brush or spray both sides of the steaks with oil and season them with salt and pepper. Grill over Direct High heat until cooked to desired doneness, 6–8 minutes for medium rare, turning once (if flare-ups occur, move the steaks temporarily over Indirect High heat). Remove from the grill and let rest for 3–5 minutes. Serve warm with the sauce on the side.

RECIPE COURTESY OF WEBER GRILLS
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GRILLED STEAKS WITH CHIMICHURRI

Chimichurri Sauce

- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 cup fresh Italian parsley, packed
- 1 cup fresh cilantro, packed
- 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 2 tbsp. fresh oregano, chopped
- 1/2 tsp. dried crushed red pepper
- 2/3 cup olive oil

Place garlic cloves in a food processor and pulse a few times. Add remaining ingredients and finely process. Serve on grilled steaks.

Grilled Steaks

Strip Steak

(based on a 12-oz. steak)

Take meat out of refrigerator and allow to come to room temperature to ensure even cooking. Heat grill to medium-high. Lightly brush steaks with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill for 4–6 minutes on each side for medium rare. Let steak rest for 5 minutes before serving.

Bone-In Rib Eye or Porterhouse

(based on a 20-oz. steak)

Take meat out of refrigerator and allow to come to room temperature to ensure even cooking. Heat grill to medium-high. Lightly brush steaks with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill for 8–10 minutes on each side for medium rare. Let steak rest for 5 minutes before serving.

RECIPE COURTESY OF ALLEN BROTHERS



FULL-FLAVORED WINES PERFECTLY COUNTER GRILLED FOODS' SMOKY ESSENCE.



As for seafood, cooking shrimp and lobster tails on the grill gives them a sumptuous smoky flavor. Average-size shrimp grill well for everyday meals, but giant black tiger shrimp never fail to impress guests. Allen Brothers offers succulent tail-on tiger shrimp—all the better for handling both on and off the grill.

For a simple yet superb summer dessert, place peach halves or pineapple spears on the grill and sprinkle with brown sugar. Serve them with vanilla ice cream or, even better, mascarpone. For a special dessert, try Allen Brothers' streusel-topped Cherry Berry Pie or its Great Grandma's Cake, a nine-pound, six-layer chocolate extravaganza.

Sip Summer Wines

No grilled meal is complete without the requisite summer drinks. To make a pitcher of cold ginger tea, peel and coarsely chop a two-inch-long ginger root. Add it to three cups of water, along with freshly squeezed lemon juice, whole cloves, and peppercorns, and boil for 5 to 10 minutes, or to taste. Let it cool, filter into a pitcher through a sieve, and refrigerate until ready to serve.

When it comes to pairing wine with dishes cooked on the grill, choose full-flavored wines to counter the food's smoky essence. Among the offerings from its Napa Valley vineyards, St. Supéry Vineyards and Winery features award-winning cabernet sauvignon and sauvignon blanc wines that

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are ideal for summer meals. The St. Supéry Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 makes a perfect accompaniment to steak or salmon. Aromas of black cherry, currant, and blueberry come together harmoniously in this classic Napa Valley cabernet. The wine's well-structured tannins give it a mature finish that stands up well to grilled meats; at the same time, it can balance a plate of lighter grilled vegetables or even grilled mussels.

Merlot is another great summer red that goes well with barbecue and grilled meats, including lamb. The 2006 J. Lohr Estates Los Osos Merlot, made in Paso Robles by J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, features blueberry, raspberry, and cherry fruit

aromas, layered with lifted spicy, cedary oak. This bold and complex wine beautifully complements a meal prepared on the grill. It is also a year-round wine that has great aging potential. It can be enjoyed immediately or within ten years.

The 2005 J. Lohr Estates South Ridge Syrah is another rich and flavorful wine that has the fingerprints of Paso Robles all over it. The region's hot days and cool nights have proven ideal for this classic Rhône grape. Filled with inviting plum flavors and enticing layers of blackberry, cherry, and charred spice, this is a perfect wine to pair with hearty meats and fresh game. To enjoy this wine's red-fruit flavors,

MARINATED FLANK STEAK

Pair with J. Lohr Estates Los Osos Merlot

For the marinade:

- 1 large bunch cilantro (about 1 ²/₃ cups coarsely chopped)
- 1 2-inch piece fresh ginger
- 6 garlic cloves
- 1 cup soy sauce
- 1 cup dry sherry
- ¹/₂ cup sugar
- 2 tbsp. crushed red pepper

2 lbs. flank steak

1. Coarsely chop the cilantro. Peel and slice the ginger. Combine chopped cilantro, sliced ginger, and the remaining marinade ingredients in a food processor or a blender and purée.

2. Trim the flank steak of any fat or sinew. Place the steak in a nonreactive flat pan. (A tightly sealed heavy-duty plastic bag can be used instead of a pan.) Pour the marinade over the steak. Cover and refrigerate overnight, turning occasionally.

3. Remove the flank steak from the refrigerator and let it approach room temperature. Prepare a medium-hot barbecue. Remove the steak from the marinade. Grill to desired doneness. (Flank steaks are relatively thin and will cook quickly over the hot coals.)

4. Remove the steak from the barbecue, cover with foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Slice on the diagonal and serve immediately.

RECIPE COURTESY OF
J. LOHR VINEYARDS AND WINES

GRILLED PEACH HALVES OR PINEAPPLE SPEARS CREATE A SIMPLE YET SUPERB DESSERT.



drink it now, or, if you prefer a meatier syrah, wait a few years.

The clean, bright St. Supéry's 2007 Estate Sauvignon Blanc marries well with grilled seafood, particularly oysters, salmon, crab, halibut, shrimp, lobster, and sole, among other kinds of seafood. This showstopper features intense aromas of lime, ruby grapefruit, and guava, with a hint of cloves. It also makes a delicious accompaniment to cheese and fruit.

The key to summer entertaining is keeping everything elegant yet simple. A selection of the right grill, flavorful foods, and well-paired wines goes a long way in creating nights to remember for family and friends.

BARBECUED SHRIMP WITH CHIPOTLE, CILANTRO, AND LIME DIPPING SAUCE

Pair with St. Supéry sauvignon blanc. The crisp, clean, fruit-forward flavor profile of the St. Supéry sauvignon blanc acts as a perfect counterbalance to the tangy, smoky, and slightly spicy flavors of the dipping sauce.

3/4 cup sour cream

**1 tsp. minced canned
chipotle peppers in
adobo sauce**

**1 tbsp. finely chopped
cilantro leaves**

1/2 tsp. grated lime zest

1 tsp. fresh lime juice

1/2 tsp. minced garlic

1/4 tsp. kosher salt

1 lb. large shrimp (16–20 pieces)

2 tbsp. olive oil

Sea salt

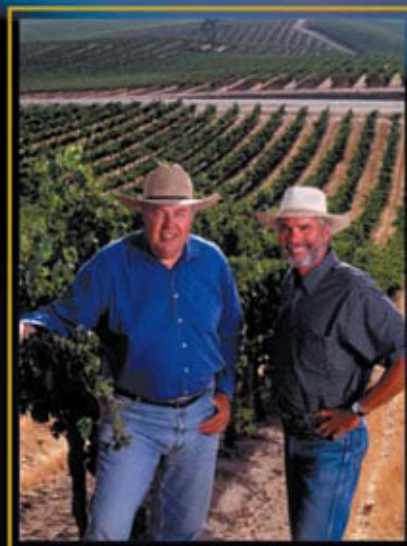
1. In a small bowl, combine the sour cream, chipotle, cilantro, lime zest, lime juice, garlic, and salt. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours to let the flavors develop.

2. Peel and devein the shrimp, leaving the tails intact. Toss the shrimp with the olive oil and sprinkle lightly with sea salt.

3. Thread the shrimp onto metal or wood skewers and cook on a hot grill for 2–3 minutes per side. Serve with the dipping sauce on the side.

RECIPE COURTESY OF
ST. SUPÉRY WINERY AND VINEYARDS

“AT J. LOHR,
WE FOCUS ON FLAVOR
FROM VINEYARD
TO BOTTLE.”



Jerry Lohr,
Owner/President

Steve Carter,
Vineyard Manager

Jerry Lohr *Steve Carter*

FLAVOR SECOND TO NONE

That's the focus at J. Lohr. Sounds so simple, yet it's surprisingly complex. Unrivaled flavor demands total control, every step of the way. That's why Jerry Lohr carefully selected new French clones of Merlot planted on rootstock that are ideally suited to the limestone and clay soils of his estate vineyards in Paso Robles. One of California's premier red wine appellations, the region's warm days and cool nights yield grapes with deep and concentrated fruit flavors. Longtime Vineyard Manager Steve Carter nurtures these vineyards to optimize deep currant and cherry flavors inherent to the Merlot grape. That's how J. Lohr achieves flavor second to none. Taste for yourself.

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BOLD FLAVORS, ANCIENT ROOTS

CYPRUS REVEALS ITS COLORFUL HISTORY ON THE PLATE

by William Woys Weaver photographs by Penny De Los Santos



CYPRUS

SOME 15 YEARS AGO, on my first trip to the Mediterranean nation of Cyprus, I stood on a rocky peak on the Akamas Peninsula, on the westernmost point of the island, breathing air flush with the scent of wild oregano and citrus. I couldn't help feeling immersed in a landscape from Homer's *Odyssey*. I had been here for only a few days, but at that moment, everything I had known about this place—its complicated political history, its myriad culinary influences, its natural bounty—seemed to come together.

As a culinary historian, I had long been fascinated by Cyprus,

"a sea-port in Cyprus".

When I landed on the island, I found ample evidence of its past on modern-day Cypriot tables—in the generous use of spices, for example, and in the pilafs made with ancient varieties of wheat. But the stories that connect the dots between the past and the present were harder to trace. There were few historical cookbooks, and little research had been done about the origins of specific dishes. Along the island's coasts, where tourism and development had ushered in an increasingly global, fast-food-oriented culture, the old ways of cooking were clearly fading.

"You have to go into the coun-

try's interior," said Ilya Dostoyevsky, a Siberian-born Cypriot journalist who befriended me at that conference and who had done extensive research on Mediterranean soils. "Visit the small towns," he urged. There, he promised, I'd find home cooks who still made their own halloúmi, the island's famous salty sheep's-and-goats'-milk cheese, and taverna owners who grilled subtly marinated kebabs of the most flavorful lamb, redolent of the animals' diet of wild herbs and grasses. Ilya invited me to use his home, in the coastal town of Limassol, as a base for exploration on return trips. And, for the past decade and

a half, that's what I've done, while consulting with scholars at the University of Cyprus at Nicosia, the country's capital, and visiting families around the country who have graciously invited me into their lives. And what I've found out is that the story of Cypriot cuisine has largely been written in the kitchens of everyday cooks and taverna owners—and that the island will indeed offer its secrets to an outsider, but slowly, over the course of time.

CYPRUS IS LIKE A stranger with a complicated past. Because of the country's longstanding political and ethnic divisions, there

In Cyprus, one talks not of oregano but of which kind; there are 23 species of the herb flourishing in this ancient place

an island about the size of Puerto Rico, that's located in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean. So, when I was asked to give a presentation at a food conference there in 1993, I jumped at the chance. From my research, I knew that Cyprus's cuisine stretched back at least a few millennia and that its flavors are a commingling of those of Byzantium and the Near East. I'd also read of the significant role Cyprus played in global foodways. Recent archaeological finds, for example, have lent credence to the widely held belief that viticulture in Cyprus dates back some 5,500 years—longer than anywhere else in the Mediterranean. Marjoram is said to have originated here, as is cauliflower. Pliny the Elder, the first century Roman naturalist, claimed that capers spread to Europe from Cyprus. And, during the Middle Ages, Famagusta, a city in Cyprus's northeast, was one of Christendom's greatest spice emporiums; some people believe it is the place William Shakespeare had in mind when he set *Othello* in a



CYPRUS

are questions you do not ask, and there are many that have no clear answers. The island is geographically closer to Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon than it is to Greece, which claims Cyprus as an integral part of its own cultural sphere. Cyprus has long been a pawn of empires and, over the centuries, has been occupied by the Persians, Romans, French Crusaders, Venetians, Ot-

toman Turks, and British, who granted Cyprus nationhood in 1960. In 1974 the Turkish army, responding to a coup staged in Cyprus by the military junta that ruled Greece at the time, invaded the northern portion of the island and has occupied it ever since; today a buffer zone divides the north from the south, which is populated mostly by Greek

verse palette of flavors that changes from place to place. The cooks I met talked not about oregano but about which kind; there are 23 species of the herb growing on the island. Some, like the Syrian subspecies found in Kambos, a town in the Troodos Mountains, are profusely aromatic and well suited to cooking; others, like the rare Armenian variety that proliferates across the north, have traditionally been used for medicinal purposes.

Wild herbs and greens flourish across the isle and are a cornerstone of its cuisine: arugula, nettle, amaranth, dandelion, wild celery, purslane, glasswort, mallow, and sea holly, to name a few. The dish I encountered the most frequently in homes and taverns involved sautéing greens and eggs in locally pressed olive or sesame oil and then dressing the mixture with a squeeze of lemon or bitter orange.

While some ingredients grow wild across much of the island, others, such as roses, are cultivated in specific places and have become regional specialties. One spring morning, Ilya and I drove to the southern town of Agros, where we saw women in the fields of roses that surrounded town, picking buds and tossing them into baskets. Later that day, one of the women invited us to her house, where I watched her boil the petals to make rose water, which she would later use in her rose petal jam.

The markets of Cyprus are crowded with these kinds of handmade delicacies, as well as all manner of locally raised foods. At Limassol's grand public market, located in the historic center of town, I marveled at the mushrooms, olives, greens, and countless other ingredients foragers had brought to sell. The range of cured meats, too, was impressive: sausages, bacon, and dry-aged hams, many of which had been



From left, Dimitris and Chloe Tembriotis; rusks made of chickpea flour; garden tomatoes. Previous pages, from left, fava bean stew; walnut spoon sweets.

Cypriots. All across the island, meals that bear the imprint of Greek origins are often also laced with sesame paste, sumac, and other ingredients that migrated from the countries immediately to the east of the Mediterranean, the region historically known as the Levant.

And yet, when I returned to start exploring the island's regional cuisines, with Ilya as my guide, I saw that the food was less influenced by cultural divisions than by the island's own varied terrain. A central plain separates the Kyrenia and Pentadactylos mountains, to the north, from the Troodos Mountains, to the south and west, giving rise to a wide range of microclimates and a di-

WILLIAM WOYS WEAVER is writing a cookbook on the food and wines of Cyprus. This is his second article for SAVEUR.

RECIPE

Koukkia Kouñnes

(Fava Bean Stew with Garlic, Thyme, and Bay Leaves)

SERVES 4-6

This is a country dish that is commonly served as an accompaniment to mezedhes—a traditional assortment of small plates—at Kamares Taverna, in the southern town of Lofou. It is often eaten with freshly baked bread, which is used to sop up the aromatic broth. Be sure to choose dried fava beans that have their seed coat still intact; if hulled and split, they'll disintegrate when cooked.

- 1 lb. dried fava beans (see page 108)
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more, to taste
- 6 cloves garlic, quartered
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 large yellow onion, roughly chopped
- 5 cups chicken broth
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- Slices of country-style bread

1. Put the fava beans into a large bowl, cover with water by 3", and let soak in the refrigerator for 8 hours or overnight.

2. Drain fava beans; set aside. In a 4-quart saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Add garlic, thyme, bay leaves, and onions; cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly browned, about 15 minutes.

3. Add the fava beans and broth and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until the beans are tender and the broth has thickened slightly, about 2 1/2 hours.

4. Season the fava bean stew with salt and pepper and stir in the lemon juice. Transfer to a serving bowl and drizzle more olive oil over the top. Serve with the bread.





The art of souvlaki on Cyprus is different from that practiced in Turkey and Greece: the distinction is in the marinade

marinated in wine and smoked over carob or myrtle wood. Ilya also introduced me to arkaténa, or rusks: savory, dense breads made with chickpea flour, shaped into rings, and baked twice to achieve a texture not unlike that of biscotti. At a local taverna, I followed suit as Ilya and other diners dipped ar-

katéna in coffee or wine until they were moist and almost melting.

Tavernas, the casual restaurants around which Cypriot social life revolves, are always ripe spots for discovery. It was at a taverna in Nicosia eight years ago that I fell in love with the bold and elegant red wines made

from the native marathéftiko grapes that thrive on the stony mountainsides above the ancient village of Kilani, in the southern part of the island (see “Ancient Vines”, below). And just a few years ago, at Kamares, a raucous taverna north of Limassol that Ilya and I stumbled on after vis-

iting vineyards one day, the owner and cook, Xenios Economou, served us a simple fava bean stew, redolent of garlic and lemon, that was strikingly elegant,

A vineyard in the Troodos Mountains, above; facing page, pork kebabs with cucumber-mint yogurt sauce.

ANCIENT VINES Cyprus’s chalky soil and sunny, temperate climate gave birth to what recent archaeological finds suggest was the earliest recorded viticulture in the Mediterranean—predating the traditions of Egypt and Greece—dating back at least 5,500 years. Even today, the foothills of the Troodos Mountains, located in the southwestern part of the island, are dotted with centuries-old vines, wizened and as fat as tree trunks. Until recently, much of the wine produced for export has been on the sweet side: because Cyprus has one of the longest growing seasons in the world, owing to a warm climate and radical variations in temperature between vineyards at different altitudes, the grapes can be left on the vines longer to develop a high sugar content. In recent years, however, winemakers have adopted techniques that are lending more structure and balance to the local wines, and Cypriot wines, particularly those

made from indigenous varieties, are finding an international fan base. Having been spared phylloxera, the devastating blight that grape growers around the world have combated since the late 19th century, Cyprus’s native grapevines are healthy and pure. One of the best-known Cypriot wines is the honeyed, dark amber commandaria dessert wine, a blend of the native black mavro and white xynisteri varieties; it is thought to have been in continuous production longer than any other wine. The mavro grape is also used to make red table wines, which are often characterized by cherry and black currant candy notes and taste the best chilled. Xynisteri produces an earthy but light white table wine that Cypriots drink young. One of the most successful revivals has been the native marathéftiko grape, which producers like the Vlassides winery, in the southern village of Kilani, are turning into bold, full-bodied red wines. —W.W.W.

CYPRUS

considering its humble ingredients. The stew was a prelude to the taverna's signature dish: souvlakia hirina, or pork kebabs, which arrived at our table with a cucumber-mint yogurt sauce. The meat was grilled over charcoal and perfectly tender.

Good spit cooks, Ilya lamented as we ate, are a dying breed in Cyprus. I watched Economou deftly maneuver skewers over the fire, instinctively pulling them from the heat the moment the meat had achieved perfection. I learned from Economou that on the island the art of souvlaki is different from that practiced in other parts of the world. The distinction is in the marinade: Cypriot cooks favor extra-virgin sesame oil and, depending on regional preferences, various combinations of spices and herbs, including oregano, cumin, cinnamon, sumac, coriander seeds, mastic berries (which have a piney essence and

come from a native tree known for its flavorful resin), cilantro, and mint. Some cooks add wine or the juice of sour oranges, both of which tenderize the meat. The resulting flavor is remarkably delicate and complex, intended to complement, not dominate, other parts of a meal.

IF THE TAVERNAS offered a window onto Cyprus's gastronomic soul, then Cypriot home kitchens constitute the soul itself. With each trip I've made there, I've tried to focus on a different region, and every time—whether it was an excursion to Platres, known for its grilled trout, or a trip to Athienou, famous for its breads—I've found home cooks to be the best repositories of their area's often inscrutable culinary traditions. One branch of Cypriot cuisine that had long eluded me was that of Paphos, a district in the south- *(continued on page 62)*

RECIPE

Souvlakia Hirina

(Pork Kebabs with Cucumber-Mint Yogurt Sauce)

SERVES 4

Redolent of oregano and cinnamon, these pork kebabs owe their tenderness to a red wine marinade that helps break down even the toughest cuts of meat.

FOR THE SOUVLAKIA:

- 2 cups red wine
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 6 cloves garlic, smashed
- 2 lbs. pork shoulder, cut into 1 1/2" cubes
- Freshly ground pepper, to taste

FOR THE YOGURT SAUCE:

- 1 cucumber (about 12 oz.)
- 1 1/2 cups yogurt
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh mint leaves
- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin sesame oil (see page 108) or extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste

FOR THE GARNISH:

- 4 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal
- 1 cup flat-leaf parsley leaves, roughly chopped
- 4 pita breads, warmed

1. Make the souvlakia: Whisk together the wine, oregano, cumin, salt, thyme, cinnamon, and garlic in a large bowl. Add the cubes of pork and toss well to combine. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and set aside to let marinate at room temperature for at least 2 hours or in the refrigerator overnight.

2. Meanwhile, make the yogurt sauce: Trim the ends off the cucumber and peel it. Cut the cucumber in half lengthwise. Using a small spoon, scrape out and discard the seeds from each half. Finely chop the cucumber and transfer it to a medium bowl. Stir in the yogurt, mint, oil, and garlic, and season with salt. Cover the sauce with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use. (The sauce can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 1 week.)

3. Arrange an oven rack 7-8" from the broiler element and heat broiler. Remove the pork from the marinade (reserve marinade), thread the cubes onto 4 metal or wooden skewers, and arrange on a foil-lined baking sheet. (If using wooden skewers, make sure to cover the ends completely with the pork cubes, to prevent the skewers from burning.) Season the pork with salt and pepper. Pour the marinade into a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Broil the kebabs, generously basting with the marinade occasionally, until browned on all sides and cooked through, 20-25 minutes. (Alternatively, the kebabs may be cooked over a medium-hot grill for the same amount of time.)

4. Arrange the skewers on a platter and scatter the scallions and parsley over them. Serve with the yogurt sauce and the pita.



FLAVORS OF CYPRUS

Cyprus's terrain yields a diverse bounty of foods. The incomparably tender local walnuts, called karidia **1**, eaten when still young and green, are frequently used for pastry filling and in spoon sweets (preserves served on spoons along with coffee or chilled water), as well as in savory stuffings. Cured pork products—sausages, hams, bacon, and smoked tenderloin **2**—are famous for their singular, delicate flavor, derived in large part from cold-smoking over the leaves and wood of the carob tree. The berries of the terebinth tree **3**, a close cousin of the common pistachio tree, give confections, flat breads, and marinades a piney flavor. Salty halloumi cheese **4**, produced in Cyprus for centuries, is traditionally made from goats' and sheep's milk; a poaching in its own whey once the cheese curds have set gives halloumi a distinctive springy texture that stands up well to grilling and frying. Intensely aromatic Cypriot sage (*Salvia cypria*) **5** makes a fragrant, restorative herbal tea that Cypriots customarily offer to guests. Candies made of grape must (freshly pressed grapes) and almonds or walnuts are pleasantly chewy and not overly sweet; the type known as soutzoukos **6** have a distinctive, sausagelike shape. A staple of Cypriot seaport cookery since the Middle Ages, salt cod **7**, usually seasoned with the juice of lemons and bitter oranges, is often added to dips, fish sausages, and savory pies. All of the many species of native oregano, or rigani **8**, lend a faintly musky essence to marinades, salads, vegetable and meat dishes, and herb breads. Cypriots use the small, bitter native orange called kitrómiló **9** to make preserves by adding sugar to the mashed fruit and boiling the mixture; they also use the rind to flavor cakes. Coriander seeds **10** have been a favorite seasoning on the island for thousands of years. Local cooks add them to pickles, marinades, and sausages, to which the seeds lend their pleasing, lemony bite. —W.W.W.





CYPRUS

METHOD

Eliés Tsakkistés me Kóliandro

(Lemon and Coriander Marinated Olives)

Chunks of lemon and cracked coriander seeds lend a bright flavor to these earthy olives. When making this dish, we prefer to use the nutty, cracked Cypriot olives called kipriakes eliés, but you can use Italian cerignola or Spanish gordal olives and get equally good results. In a large bowl, mix 1 lb. cracked (but not pitted) green olives with $\frac{1}{3}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lemon juice, 2 tbsp. whole cracked coriander seeds, 4 bruised cloves garlic, and 3 fresh or dried bay leaves. Cut 1 lemon into wedges lengthwise; cut each wedge crosswise into $\frac{1}{2}$ "-thick pieces. Add lemon pieces to olives; stir well to combine. Cover olives with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or up to 1 month. Bring the olives to room temperature before serving. Serves 8-10.



cracked green olives flavored with coriander, lemon juice, and garlic; eliopitta, a long roll of pastry filled with mashed olives; homemade halloúmi cheese, placed atop tomatoes; and kók-kina manitárka, a variety of wild mushroom, which Dimitris's 47-year-old son, Takis, had gathered from pine forests some 30 miles from their home and simmered in red wine. I was left searching for words to express my gratitude, but before I could say anything, Dimitris, a wiry man with a neat, white beard, came in, introduced himself, and told me to dig in.

Until about 50 years ago, mezedhes were the preserve of men and based on drinking—either wine or zivanía, the local form of grape schnapps. Now they constitute the standard format at many Cypriot restaurants, so much so that you will find mezé-style offerings even at Chinese restaurants and American-style pizza parlors. When I

The sweet fragrance of blooming citrus trees gave way to the aroma of the fresh sage tea—a traditional Cypriot welcoming drink

(continued from page 59) western part of the country. Until about ten years ago, when a superhighway was tunneled through a series of rocky massifs that hemmed in the coastal district, Paphos had been mostly cut off from the rest of Cyprus. I knew that Paphians spoke their own dialect of Cypriot

a magic touch. Her cooking has the taste of old Paphos."

Last year, on my most recent trip to Cyprus, I called the Tembriotises, and they invited me to visit. I borrowed Ilya's car and, arriving in Emba, followed unmarked streets past gardens of banana trees to the couple's home. Chloe, a petite 60-year-old woman, greeted me at the door and ushered me inside their house. The unmistakable, sweet fragrance of blooming citrus trees—in this case lemon and kitrómiló, which bears the small bitter orange used in many dishes across the island—wafted into the couple's modest living room through an open sliding door leading to a garden. Quickly that scent was superseded by the aroma of sage, as Chloe presented me with a steaming cup of tea



Clockwise from top left: marinated olives; the Tembriotises' mezé spread; a regular at Kamares Taverna in Lofou; legumes on sale at the market in Limassol.

made with the herb—a traditional welcoming gesture.

Chloe led me into the dining room, where a long table was covered with a spread of mezedhes, or small plates. It included bombári, a sausage stuffed with rice, mint, and tomatoes;

asked Chloe about this new trend, she sighed with resignation. "Our children are getting too fat," she said. "In the old days, you turned over a foot stool, placed a basket over it as a table, and sat on the ground around it. That was dinner in the village. Cooking was

A recipe for bulgur pilaf at
SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

Greek and that the Romans had established a provincial capital here shortly after 30 B.C., but I knew little of the region's present-day character. An American friend living in Cyprus had told me about Chloe and Dimitris Tembriotis, the owners of a much loved taverna in the Paphian village of Emba that has since closed. "You must go and see them," my friend said. "Chloe has



CYPRUS

simple, but it was healthy." Whatever Chloe's misgivings about the changes in Cypriot eating habits, she had laid one of the finest mezé tables I'd ever seen.

But that was just the beginning. Soon, more dishes appeared. I sampled an excellent paskiá, a savory pie, traditionally consumed at Easter, made with coarsely chopped pork and lamb heart, liver, lungs, and meat, as well as a dense goat cheese aged in baskets made of myrtle twigs. I tried pourgóuri, a creamy bulgur pilaf redolent of tomatoes and garlic, and homemade loukániko, pork sausage that Chloe had flavored with cumin, pepper, mastic ber-

ries, and coriander and steeped for eight days in red wine before air-drying it.

Dimitris, a former fisherman, explained that he comes from the wine-producing mountain village of Tembria (which gave his family its last name); Chloe comes from Argaka, near the coastal town of Polis. Takis, who was doing a heroic job of interpreting our sometimes boisterous conversation, served a dish of sautéed mushrooms and onions called afelia and explained that it was flavored with pouilles tou laoú, a local variety of white truffle, which he had harvested from the base of olive trees

growing nearby. The truffles infused the dish with an earthy and faintly floral quality.

The 'Tembriotises' larder seemed limitless, and their enthusiasm for local fare was equally so. Slowly, as the conversation

progressed and one dish gave way to another and another, a clearer picture of Paphos, its history and its cuisine, emerged. Chloe said that many of her staple ingredients go by different names in mainland Greece and in other



One extraordinary dish gave way to another, and over the course of the meal, a clear picture of Paphos, its cuisine and its culture, emerged

METHOD

Horta me Avga

(Sautéed Eggs and Greens with Lemon)

This simple dish, a favorite of home cooks across Cyprus, makes a light repast that's ideally suited to the country's hot climate. Trim a few inches off the top of 6 green onions; each onion should measure about 6" long. Halve green onions lengthwise; cut each half crosswise into 1/8"-thick strips. Set aside. Crack 5 eggs into a bowl. Heat 1/3 cup extra-virgin sesame oil or extra-virgin olive oil in a 12" nonstick skillet over high heat. Add onions and 3 bruised cloves garlic; cook, stirring frequently with a spatula, until lightly browned, about 4 minutes. Add 9 cups loosely packed arugula and 1 tsp. kosher salt; stir, until greens are wilted, about 1 minute. Quickly add eggs and 3 tbsp. roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley; stir vigorously to break up yolks and whites. Let cook, undisturbed, for 30 seconds. Break eggs up a bit with a spatula. Let cook until set, about 30 seconds more. Transfer to a bowl, squeeze juice of 1/2 lemon over top, and sprinkle with freshly ground black pepper. Serves 4-6.



parts of Cyprus—black pepper, for example, is known in the local dialect as *artimata*. Suddenly, I connected the dots, recalling that during the Middle Ages, *artimade* was the Franco-Cypriot term for poudre forte, a peppery spice powder used to flavor meats and gingerbreads. Chloe also explained that the local word for cumin, *artisha*, is rooted in the Greek word for bread, *artos*. Cumin was used to flavor baked goods in ancient times; even today, she said, it is possible to find country bakers who still make cumin-scented breads. I delighted in this revelation. The bread she described was, like many of the discoveries I've made in Cyprus, a piece of living history. I couldn't wait to try it. 🐦

THE PANTRY, page 108: Sources for a variety of Cypriot ingredients and wines.

Clockwise from top left: Cypriot smoked pork sausage; an olive tree on the Paphian coast; sautéed eggs and greens with lemon.

THE GUIDE

CYPRUS

Dinner with drinks and tip:

INEXPENSIVE Under \$30 MODERATE \$31–\$50

WHERE TO STAY

The bustling coastal city of Limassol is an ideal base from which to explore Cyprus; it's conveniently located halfway between the country's capital, Nicosia, and the region of Paphos, where many fine Roman antiquities and superb local cooking can be found. Quieter lodging may be had 30 miles outside of Limassol in the village of Platres, in the heart of the Troodos Mountains. Flights from abroad arrive at both Paphos and Larnaca international airports, on the western and eastern ends of the island, respectively.

FOREST PARK HOTEL 62 Spyrou Kyprianon, Platres (357/25/421-751; www.forestparkhotel.com.cy). Double: \$98. In its heyday, in the late 1930s, monarchs, sheiks, and cosmopolitan literati spent entire seasons at this sprawling mountain resort. The modern incarnation, a luxurious hotel, offers chalet suites alongside solar-heated and freshwater pools.

KANIKA PANTHEON HOTEL Corner 28th October Street and Metaxa Street, Limassol (357/25/591-11; www.kanikahotels.com). Double: \$161. This recently renovated, reasonably priced hotel is situated close to the historic center of Limassol, near the city's famous public market.

LE MERIDIEN LIMASSOL SPA AND RESORT Old Limassol-Nicosia Road, Limassol (357/25/862-000; www.lemeridien.com). Double: \$417. Located a short distance from the ruins of the ancient city of Amathus, this five-star hotel boasts its own botanical garden, nine restaurants, a kitchen garden, and a world-class spa.

NEW HELVETIA HOTEL 6 Helvetia Street, Platres (41/21/310-0835; www.minotel.com). Double: \$139. This small, picturesque hotel, built in 1929, serves classic, rustic breakfasts of cheese, figs, olives, bread, and strong coffee on balconies overlooking the Troodos Mountains.

WHERE TO EAT

Virtually every village in Cyprus has a taverna, or café, where the best local cuisine can be sampled, often in the company of an ebullient local clientele.

KAMARES TAVERNA Lofou Village (357/25/470-719; <http://kamareslofou.com>). Inexpensive. Chef and owner Xenios Economou cooks some of Cyprus's best traditional cuisine at this always lively taverna, situated in a historic inn in Lofou, one of the best-preserved medieval stone villages in Cyprus. Reservations are recommended.



NEON PHALIRON 135 Gladstonos Street, Limassol (357/25/365-768; 357/25/346-021). Moderate. This 40-year-old eatery maintains a reputation as being the best fish restaurant on the island. Its wine list includes excellent varieties from local wineries. Reservations are recommended.

SEVEN ST. GEORGES TAVERN Yeroskepos, Paphos (357/26/963-176; www.7stgeorgestavern.com). Moderate. Set in a beautiful old stone farmhouse, this popular taverna has just one dinner seating per night, so diners can linger well into the evening. The menu features only organic, seasonal ingredients. Go with a group

to share as many of the local delicacies as possible, such as quail with wild greens. Reservations are required.

WHAT TO DO

For information on visiting the following destinations, contact the Cyprus Tourism Organization: 212/683-5280.

AKAMAS PENINSULA Northwest Paphos district. This 88-square-mile peninsula on the far western tip of Cyprus offers breathtaking views of Mediterranean landscapes and sea. Arrange for a tour to see indigenous mouflons (a type of wild sheep), foxes, sea turtles, flocks of migrating butterflies, wild orchids, and rare tulips.

KOURION AND THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO HYLATES Near Episkopi; Limassol district. The ruins of Kourion, an ancient city destroyed by an earthquake in the fourth century A.D., sit atop a spectacular bluff overlooking the sea. Nearby is the Temple of Apollo Hylates, a pilgrims' sanctuary and one of the most famous healing temples of the ancient world.

LIMASSOL MUNICIPAL MARKET Historic Center, Limassol. Located in an old stone building that was recently renovated and now incorporates new restaurants, artisan workshops, and a music stage, this market houses dozens of food stalls, selling fresh fish, cured olives, local cheeses, cured meats, fresh breads, and other local specialties.

OMODHOS Northern Limassol district. The wine-producing village of Omodhos, in the heart of the Cypriot grape-growing region, in the foothills of the southwestern Troodos Mountains, welcomes visitors to an open market where Cypriot crafts, like the island's famous hand-blown glass, are sold, along with foods like rusks and pickled caper shoots. Try the bold red wine made from the local mavro grape at the Zinon winery, outside the village.

BROWN RICE

BORN AGAIN

BROWN RICE, POSSESSED OF EARTHY FLAVORS AND TEXTURES, IS BEING EMBRACED WITH RENEWED FERVOR BY FARMERS AND COOKS

By Peggy Knickerbocker Photographs by Barbara Ries

BROWN RICE



BROWN RICE

BROWN RICE, THAT WHOLE-GRAIN STAPLE popular in the 1960s and '70s, had virtually disappeared from my culinary repertoire when I happened on the Massa Organics stand at the Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market, in my hometown, San Francisco, last spring. Arrayed on a display table were single-serving cups of the Massa farm's organically grown, medium-grain Calrose brown rice, seasoned with toasted sage, black currants, and olive oil. I tasted some; the rice was nutty and slightly sweet, with a light yet chewy texture. It was good, uncommonly good, and completely unlike the comparatively tough, bland-tasting brown rice I remember eating during San Francisco's counterculture heyday, when consuming the nutrient-packed food was an act more of virtue than of pleasure.

Noticing my surprise, Greg Massa, the boyish-looking 37-year-old farmer who owns Massa Organics, introduced himself and explained that brown rice—essentially, rice that's



RECIPE

Chicken and Brown Rice with Chorizo

SERVES 6

In this dish, meaty chicken thighs and smoky chorizo combine with brown rice to make a hearty one-pot dish similar to arroz con pollo, the classic Spanish and Latin American specialty.

- 2½ lbs. bone-in skin-on chicken thighs
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- ¾ lb. smoked, dried chorizo, cut into 1"-thick slices (see page 108)
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped fresh oregano
- ½ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1½ cups long-grain brown rice, rinsed
- ½ cup white wine
- 3 roasted red peppers, peeled, seeded, and cut into thick strips
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup frozen peas

1. Heat oven to 400°. Season the chicken lightly with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a 4-quart dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add the chicken, skin side down, and cook, without turning, until the skin is a deep golden brown, about 8 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a plate and set aside. (Pour off and discard any accumulated fat and juices.) Add the chorizo and cook, stirring frequently, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer chorizo to a plate, leaving the fat behind in the dutch oven. Set chorizo aside.

2. Add oregano, red pepper, garlic, onion, and bay leaf to the dutch oven and cook, stirring occasionally, until onion is lightly browned and somewhat soft, about 8 minutes. Add rice and cook, stirring frequently, until surface is glossy, about 2 minutes. Add wine, bring to a boil while stirring often, and reduce by half, about 1 minute. Nestle chicken, chorizo, and peppers into rice mixture. Pour in broth and season liquid to taste with salt and pepper. Cover the dutch oven and bring to a boil over high heat. Transfer to the oven and bake until rice is tender and chicken is cooked through, about 1 hour and 10 minutes.

3. Remove the dish from oven, uncover, and gently stir in the peas with a fork. Let sit for 10 minutes, covered, to allow the flavors to meld.

Farmer Greg Massa, left, harvesting rice on his family's farm in Chico, California. Facing page, chicken and brown rice with chorizo.



BROWN RICE

had the inedible hull, or husk, removed but not the fibrous bran layers that surround the grain or the germ that lies inside it—tastes the best when it's been carefully cultivated and gently milled. He explained that the vast majority of rice farmed in California (a half million acres are devoted to the crop in the Sacramento River valley alone) is destined to become white rice and is harvested and milled on an industrial scale. He told me that his rice, by contrast, is harvested from 90 acres of wetland near Chico, 150 miles to the northeast of San Francisco, and milled at a small facility half an hour from his farm (see "Between Field and Table", page 75). It's sold both locally and internationally. I said I couldn't remember ever having looked my rice grower in the eye. "Until we started to sell at farmers' markets," Massa replied, "we had no idea of who ate our rice and if they even liked it." He sold me a couple of bags of rice and made me promise to let him know how I liked cooking with it.

In my kitchen, Massa's rice presented an epiphany: full-flavored and possessed of a distinctive texture, it inspired a whole range of preparations I'd never have considered 30 years ago. One day, I steamed the rice and seasoned it with sautéed onions, garlic, and red pepper flakes for a quick, satisfying side dish. The next day, the rice starred in a refreshing nettle soup,

Contributing editor PEGGY KNICKERBOCKER won a 2006 James Beard Award for her book Simple Soirées (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2005).

A RENAISSANCE IN JAPAN

These days, some of the most exciting cooking with brown rice is taking place in Japan, where purveyors are beginning to embrace the subtle variations that can be achieved through custom-milling and cooks are repurposing traditional techniques and dishes to accommodate the food's flavors and textures. At the forefront of this movement is Toyozo Nishijima, the owner of Suzunobu, a rice boutique in Tokyo's Meguro ward. Nishijima helps his customers choose from among more than 40 varieties of rice, all of them unmilled; once customers have made a selection, they may take home the rice in its whole-bran form or request that the grains be milled to their specifications. The choices include haiga-mai, rice from which the bran coating has been removed, so the nutritious germ is left intact; buzuki-mai, rice from which only part of the bran layer has been milled off; and hatsuga-mai, brown rice that has been allowed to germinate.

Another proponent of the brown rice resurgence in Japan is Yumiko Kanou, a cookbook author and the chef at Tokyo's acclaimed restaurant Nakai-seki Sen. Kanou is one of the country's most innovative practitioners of *shojin ryori*, a vegetarian branch of Japanese cuisine. Eschewing excess and strong seasonings, those who adhere to this cooking style emphasize seasonality and favor the subtle, earthy notes of foods like burdock, carrot, daikon, and brown rice. Using these building blocks, along with a host of aromatic ingredients, Kanou has succeeded in creating full-flavored dishes that make the most of whole-grain rice's special characteristics. One of the dishes she's adapted for home cooks in one of her books is okayu, a savory porridge; hers is made with roasted brown rice and seasoned with a slightly spicy seaweed-based sauce. She also makes a toasty fried-rice dish using brown rice, pine nuts, scallions, and sesame oil.

—Karen Shimizu



BROWN RICE



and it was a welcome addition to the chicken and rice casserole that I made for dinner that weekend. Always, the rice contributed its own, nutty essence to the dish I included it in, partnering gracefully with other ingredients but never receding into the background, as white rice usually does. When I returned to Massa's stand a few weeks later, I immediately let him know how delighted I was with his rice. As I paid for a few more bags, he invited me to visit his farm. I happily accepted.

RICE, IN ITS MULTITUDE of varieties—most of them belonging to the genus *Oryza sativa*—is the principal source of nutrition for more than half the world's population. Brown rice, however, accounts for a relatively minuscule proportion of that consumption, despite the fact that the food in its whole form is exponentially more nutritious—it is full of fiber, oils, minerals, and antioxidants—than white rice, which consists of only the starchy flesh, or endosperm, of the grain. That white rice (sometimes called polished rice) is preferred by most of the world owes partly to matters of taste; in much of Asia, for example, white rice is considered more desirable, since its blander flavor serves as a more neutral vehicle for other tastes and textures.

The term *brown rice* is confusing shorthand because the

Clockwise from top left: brown rice fritters; crayfish, a few of the many creatures that thrive in Massa's rice fields; brown rice, lentil, and spinach soup; Greg Massa inspects one of the fields where Massa Organics brown rice is grown.



METHODS

Brown Rice Fritters

Similar to the Italian rice balls called arancini (which are usually made with risotto), these rice fritters have a creamy center and a slightly crisp exterior. Combine 2 cups cooked short-grain brown rice (see page 72 for a recipe), 1/2 cup grated parmigiano-reggiano, 1/2 tbsp. chopped fresh oregano, 1/2 tsp. kosher salt, 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper, and 1 beaten egg. Form rice mixture into eight 2" round cakes. Transfer cakes to a sheet tray and refrigerate for 30 minutes to allow them to firm up. Put 1/2 cup flour on a plate; dredge cakes in flour. Heat 1/4 cup olive oil and 3 tbsp. butter in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, fry cakes, turning once, until golden brown, about 4 minutes per side. Garnish each cake with a thin slice of softened butter and sprinkle with finely chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves. Serves 4.

Brown Rice, Lentil, and Spinach Soup

Brown rice and lentils, simmered with aromatic vegetables, cumin, and thyme, meld to make a delicious, full-bodied soup. Remove 1/2 lb. sweet Italian sausage from its casings. Heat 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil in a 5-quart pot over medium-high heat; add sausage and cook, stirring and breaking it up into small pieces, until browned, about 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer sausage to a plate. Add 2 finely chopped carrots, 2 finely chopped ribs celery, and 1 large finely chopped yellow onion, along with 1 tsp. cumin seeds, 1/2 tsp. dried thyme, and 1 dried chile de árbol. Cook, stirring, until lightly browned, 10–15 minutes. Add reserved sausage, 12 cups chicken broth, 1 cup rinsed long-grain brown rice, and 3/4 cup rinsed brown lentils and season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to medium-low, and cook, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until rice and lentils are soft, about 45 minutes. Stir in 1/2 lb. coarsely chopped spinach and cook until wilted, about 1 minute. Serves 6–8.

BROWN RICE



RECIPE

Perfect Brown Rice

MAKES 2 CUPS

Cooking brown rice, or at least cooking it well, is tricky. The goal is to soften the texture of each grain's fibrous bran coating—a process that takes longer than that called for in the cooking of white rice—without causing the rice to become mushy. Unfortunately, the labels on most packaged brown rice recommend an ineffective method that suggests boiling water and rice in a two-to-one ratio, then allowing the mixture to simmer for 40 minutes or more, until all the liquid is absorbed. We followed those directions and ended up throwing away more than a few pots of unsatisfying rice. What we ultimately found is that brown rice looks and tastes the best when it has been boiled and drained like pasta and then steamed in the small amount of moisture that remains in the pot. The boiling cooks the rice, while the subsequent steaming allows the grains to retain their integrity and come out light and fluffy.

1 cup short, medium, or long-grain brown rice
Kosher salt, to taste

1. Rinse rice in a strainer under cold running water for 30 seconds. Bring 12 cups water to a boil in a large pot with a tight-fitting lid over high heat. Add the rice, stir it once, and boil, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Pour the rice into a strainer over the sink.

2. Let the rice drain for 10 seconds, then return it to the pot, off the heat. Cover the pot and set it aside to allow the rice to steam for 10 minutes. Uncover the rice, fluff with a fork, and season with salt.

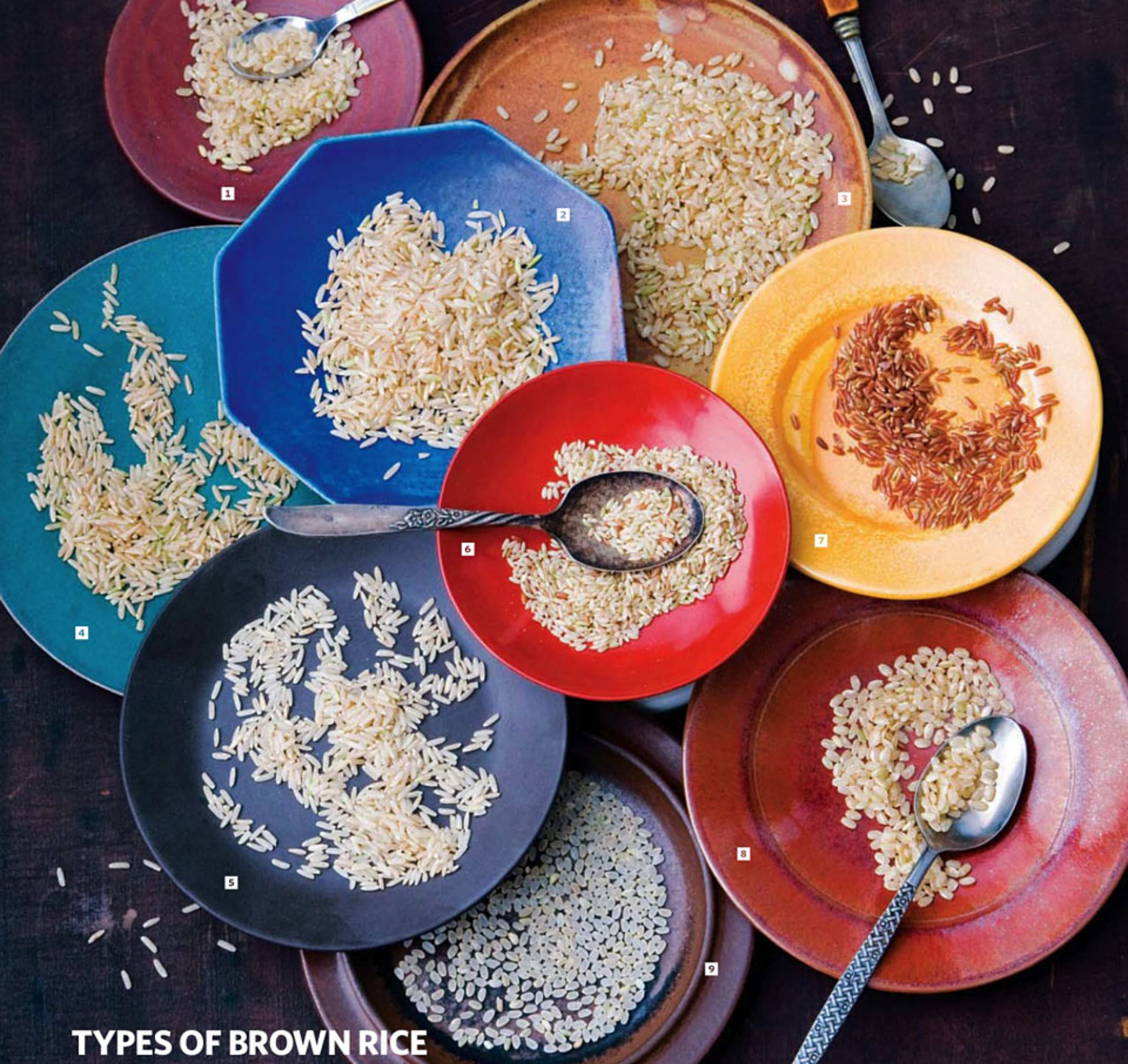
color of the bran of a given variety of rice is often not brown. Red rice from Bhutan, for example, has a reddish-brown coating, whereas the Chinese variety popularly known in the United States as forbidden rice has a black bran coat that turns purple when the grain is cooked. What's more, the manner in which the rice is milled can affect the color of the grain: for example, when a large, pestle-like implement is used for removing the hull and bran in the milling of white rice, as is the practice in many rural areas of Asia and Africa, much of the bran is actually left on the grain, creating subtly varying shades of brown, pink, or even just off-white, depending on the rice. (See "Types of Brown Rice", facing page, for a few of the principal kinds of brown rice.)

I've tasted many varieties of white rice over the years, learning to savor the differences in color and flavor, but, during my earlier brown rice-eating days, I'd never been able to find a similarly satisfying range of tastes or textures in the whole-grain versions available in the markets near my home. A probable reason for my dissatisfaction, Greg Massa tells me as he starts to show me around his farm on a luminous morning, is that most large-scale rice farming in California allows for limited flexibility with regard to the timing of the harvest and the methods used in milling. Simply put, most brown rice is harvested before it has reached its prime.

For brown rice to achieve its optimal taste and texture, Massa continues, the crop must be allowed to mature longer in the field so that the bran's flavor can mellow, immature kernels can have time to develop, and moisture present in the grains can dissipate (15 to 17 percent is considered ideal for harvesting, as opposed to 22 percent for white rice). Large producers are seldom able to accommodate a later harvest, and they customarily send their rice to huge mills, where only a small portion of the crop is set aside as brown rice, while the rest ultimately becomes white rice. Accordingly, little care is taken to protect the grains' delicate bran from damage during the dehulling process.

As the warmth of the midday sun settles over his farm, Massa shows me how the fields in which his brown rice is grown are divided into basins, which are deliberately flooded; the standing water creates a nutrient-rich mulch and suppresses the growth of weeds. In the winter, the fields, which are irrigated in part with recirculated water, are covered in a mixture of vetch, a spindly, leguminous plant, and compost. "The rice fields mimic pond life," Massa tells me, "attracting all sorts of birds, mammals, insects, and water creatures." Massa bends down to pluck a few crayfish from some shallow water at the edge of one of his fields; the crustaceans have begun digging holes in the levees separating the rice basins, he tells me, but river otters, which feed on the crayfish, are helping alleviate the problem. The farm also provides refuge for the thousands of geese, ducks, sandhill cranes, and other birds that travel along the Pacific Flyway, one of the principal avian migratory routes that traverse the United States.

Massa and his wife, Raquel Krach, have planted trees and installed nesting boxes along the borders of the rice fields to attract owls, bats, and wood ducks; the ducks have a taste for



TYPES OF BROWN RICE

Any variety of rice—whether it's the longer-grain types like those produced in the southern U.S. or the short- and medium-grain kinds like those Greg Massa and many other California farmers grow—can be milled to the brown rice stage. The nine rices shown here represent a range of distinctive textures and flavors. Some Asian producers package a version called quick-cooking brown rice **1**, from which part of the bran has been milled off, cutting cooking time considerably; quick-cooking brands are sold online and at many Asian markets. Widely available in supermarkets, long-grain brown rice **2**, usually of the *indica* subspecies, requires more water and more time to cook but yields grains with a springy character that's nicely suited to casseroles and other baked dishes. Medium-grain brown rice **3**, usually of the *japonica* subspecies, tends to be stickier and more tender when cooked than long-grain rice; it's the most common type grown in Spain and is ideal for paellas. Brown

basmati rice **4**, grown in South Asia, gets longer, not fatter, when cooked and develops a firm, dry consistency, making it perfect for biryanis and pilafs. Aromatic jasmine rice **5** has the elegant look of long-grain varieties but cooks up moist and tender, like a medium-grain rice; it's available at most Asian markets. Nicknamed baby basmati, tiny kalijira rice grains **6** could almost be mistaken for couscous; sold at Whole Foods markets, they're a fragrant, quick-cooking marvel. Nutty-sweet red rice **7**, also available at Whole Foods, owes its color to a pigment in its bran layers; some types are sweet enough to use in puddings. Ideal for croquettes and risottos, short-grain brown rice **8**, whose grains are barely longer than they are wide, can have an almost creamy texture when cooked. Expensive and hard to find in the States, Japan's haigamai **9** is a partially milled rice from which the bran has been removed but not the nutrient-packed germ, or embryo. —Karen Shimizu



BROWN RICE

METHOD

Matsunomi-No-Cha-Han

(Japanese-Style Fried Brown Rice)

This dish is based on one that appears in the Japanese-language cookbook *Saisai Gohan* by Yumiko Kanou (Shibata-Shoten, 2004), the chef and owner of Nakaiseki Sen, a vegetarian restaurant in Tokyo. Using kitchen shears, cut 2 dried chiles de árbol into thin rings and set aside. Heat 2 tbsp. Asian sesame oil (see page 102 for more information on this ingredient) in a 10" nonstick skillet over high heat. Add 7 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal, and 2 tbsp. pine nuts and cook, stirring frequently, until the scallions wilt slightly and the pine nuts take on a light golden color, about 2 minutes. Add 2 cups of cooked and cooled short-grain brown rice and 3 tsp. light soy sauce. Cook, stirring to break up the clumps, until the rice is hot and all the ingredients have mingled together, about 3 minutes. Garnish with the chiles. Serves 2.

some of the weeds that grow amid the rice crop. Nearly 90 percent of the native wetlands of California's Central Valley having been taken over by large-scale agriculture and development over the past century and a half, ecologically sustainable farms like the Massas' have become a bulwark against further environmental degradation.

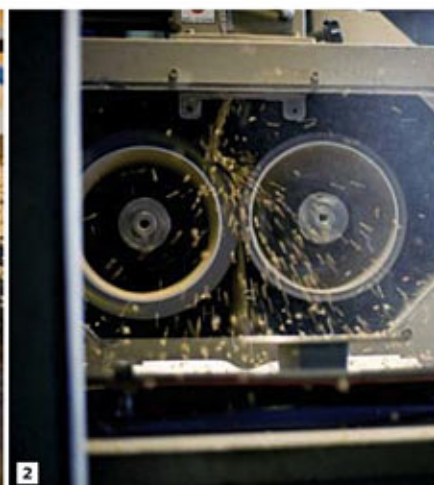
In a sense, the roots of Greg Massa's holistic approach to rice farming can be traced to his great-grandfather, a Portuguese immigrant, who first planted rice on this land in 1916, two years after the very first rice seeds were sown in the state of California in an effort to meet the demand created by immigrant Chinese railroad and mine workers. Working without chemical fertilizers or heavy machinery, those early rice cultivators in the region could be considered some of California's original organic farmers.

When Massa's father took over the business, in 1962, he adopted the highly mechanized, chemical- and energy-intensive practices that were beginning to dominate farming at the time. Today, the farm, which Massa and Krach now run in partnership with Massa's parents, is a business in transition. The couple, who worked as tropical biologists in Central America before returning to California to become farmers, are expanding their certified-organic acreage more each year. But the family must continue to farm much of its land conventionally, producing white rice and other commodity crops for which the government pays subsidies. Greg added that he also gets other payments based on the installation of projects that have an environmental benefit, such as the recycling of drained water for irrigation. "But," he says, "the big dollars go to the other major commodity crops—corn, wheat, soy, and cotton."

FOR ME, THE MOST TANGIBLE evidence of the benefits of the kind of attentive, adaptable farming the Massas practice is the rice itself. Having emerged from the torpor of hippie-era cooking, brown rice is no longer merely a substitute for white rice. It is a food that stands on its own. As such, it calls for recipes and cooking methods different from those



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BETWEEN FIELD AND TABLE

Greg Massa sends his organic, medium-grain Calrose rice crop to Far West Rice, a family-owned milling operation in Durham, California. Brown rice, which is always milled separately from batches of grain destined to become white rice, goes through several stages of processing. **1** After the freshly harvested rice, known as paddy rice, has been dried for four to six weeks at a separate facility, trucks deliver it to the mill and the grains are poured onto screens and filtering tables that help remove stalks, large stones, and other detritus. **2** The grains then pass through a dehulling machine that uses rollers to remove the rice's inedible outer husk. After that, several machines cull and further clean the hulled rice: one of them, a device called a gravity table, separates heavier grains from broken or immature kernels; another uses magnets to extract fine particles of dirt and soil (which have metallic content). **3** Next, the whole grains,

their bran coating still intact, are spun over a large cylinder, which catches broken kernels, and infrared color sorting machines detect and remove minute particles that may have escaped the machine-culling and -cleaning process. **4** Before the fully processed brown rice is packaged for shipping, it passes through another, more finely calibrated gravity table, which extracts any remaining tiny impurities. At every stage, small samples are pulled from the milling line for even closer inspection in an on-site laboratory. The process for milling white rice is virtually the same, with the addition of several steps after the final brown rice stage: an initial grating and scraping process, called a break, ruptures the grains' bran coating, causing much of it to fall away, along with the germ; a second break removes another portion of the bran; and a final break removes the rest. For polished white rice, a fourth break is added. —David McAninch

BROWN RICE

used for white rice, just as it requires a tailored approach to harvesting and milling.

As a general rule, when cooking brown rice on its own as a side dish, I allow roughly twice as much time for cooking as I do for white rice; I also use more water—at least two and a half cups per cup of rice. (See the recipe on page 72 for an excellent technique for cooking brown rice on its own.) When it comes to pairing brown rice successfully with other foods, it is helpful to part with some long-held notions about the role that rice is conventionally assumed to play in cooking. Because its bran coating prevents it from readily absorbing other flavors, brown rice is not a passive participant in most cooked preparations. Indeed, in some dishes, like stuffed tomatoes, it is the star of the show. Good-quality brown rice stands up ably to foods with bold, meaty flavors; in my brown rice repertoire, which now includes everything from bright-tasting soups to hearty stews and aromatic braises,

Clockwise from top left: coconut brown rice; Greg Massa's wife, Raquel Krach, with their daughter Lily in the kitchen of their home; tomatoes stuffed with brown rice and feta.

RECIPE

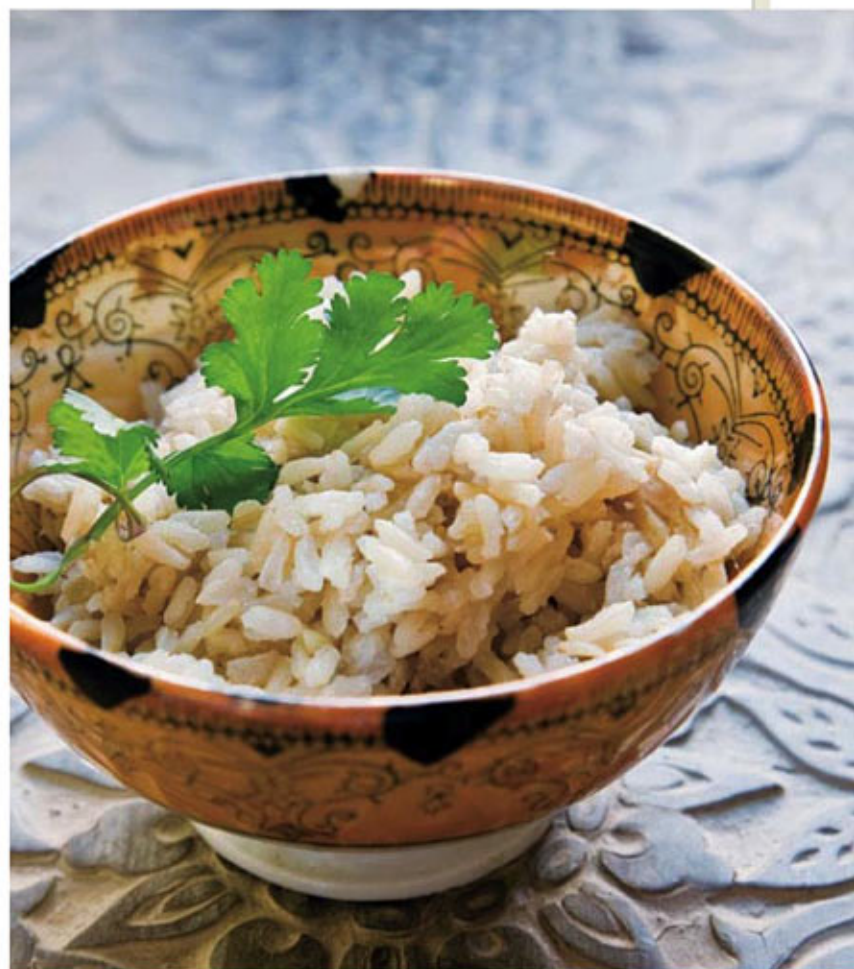
Coconut Brown Rice

SERVES 2

In this simple, alluring dish, smashed ginger perfumes the rich, coconut milk-based cooking liquid, which in turn gives the brown jasmine rice a rich, velvety texture. For the best results, we recommend using Mae Ploy brand coconut milk. In Indonesia, coconut rice is often garnished with crisp fried shallots, which provide a crunchy counterpoint to the soft, creamy rice. For a recipe for crisp fried shallots go to SAVEUR.COM/CRISPYSHALLOTS.

- 1 1" piece peeled fresh ginger
- 1 cup brown jasmine rice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsweetened coconut milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
- Cilantro sprigs for garnish

1. Using the back of a large knife, pound the ginger until it becomes bruised and somewhat stringy and releases some of its juice. This will take a few good whacks.
2. Rinse the rice in a strainer under cold running water for 30 seconds. Transfer the rice to a $1\frac{1}{2}$ -quart saucepan and add the coconut milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cold water, and the salt.
3. Add the ginger to the pan and stir well to combine with the rice, making sure that the ginger is as fully submerged in the rice as possible. Place the pan over high heat and bring the liquid to a boil while stirring with a large spoon to prevent the rice at the bottom of the pan from scorching or burning. (Don't worry if the liquid thickens considerably as it comes to a boil; that's a result of the combining of the fats in the coconut milk with the starch in the rice.)
4. Allow the rice to boil for 15 seconds, while continuing to stir. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, until the liquid is completely absorbed and rice is tender, about 45 minutes. Remove the pot from heat; allow the rice to continue to steam, covered, for 10 minutes. Fluff rice with a fork and garnish with sprigs of cilantro.



BROWN RICE



cured meat is a frequent companion, as are lamb and pork. Mixed with grated parmigiano-reggiano and egg, shaped, and fried in butter, brown rice also makes delicious fritters.

Recently I've taken to offering bags of Greg Massa's brown rice as host gifts at dinner parties; I suppose you could say I've become a true convert. Still, despite the differences between the new-generation brown rice of today and the

Greg Massa's recipe for brown rice pilaf at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

coarser-tasting versions of my younger days, I'm not above indulging in a little nostalgia from time to time. The other day, I prepared the rice just as I'd done many times back in the 1970s, tossing the cooked rice with chopped green onions and parsley, a few handfuls of roasted cashews, butter, and a splash of soy sauce. This simple dish, it occurred to me, exemplified the perfect union of the idealism of the past and that of the present. 🍴

THE PANTRY, page 108: Where to purchase Massa Organics brown rice; a source for some of the hard-to-find brown rice varieties shown on page 73.

RECIPE

Tomatoes Stuffed with Brown Rice and Feta

SERVES 6

When making this dish, use firm tomatoes; if they're too soft, the tomatoes may collapse when baked. We suggest using a creamy, less briny French feta in the rice filling to round out the tomatoes' tanginess, but any good-quality feta will do.

- 1 tbsp. plus 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 large firm beefsteak tomatoes
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 1/2 cups cooked, cooled short-grain brown rice (see page 72 for a recipe)
- 1 1/2 cups roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 3/4 cup crumbled feta
- 1/2 cup plus 2 tbsp. chopped fresh mint
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Rub the inside of a 3-quart baking dish with 1 tbsp. of the oil and set aside. Using a serrated knife, cut off the top third of each tomato and discard the tops. Cut 1/8" off the bottom of each tomato so that they'll sit upright in the baking dish; discard bottoms. Using a small spoon (a grapefruit spoon works the best), scoop out the seeds and pulp from each tomato and discard. Sprinkle the insides of each tomato with a little salt. Place the tomatoes upside down on a plate layered with paper towels and let them sit for 30 minutes to extract excess tomato juice, which may make the filling soggy.

2. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 400° and make the rice filling: Stir together the remaining olive oil, rice, parsley, feta, mint, and garlic and season with salt and pepper. (You should have about 4 cups of the rice mixture.) Arrange the tomatoes in the prepared baking dish, cut sides up, and fill each with about 2/3 cup of the rice mixture, mounding the tops slightly. Using a small brush, coat the tomatoes with some of the olive oil from the baking dish. Bake the tomatoes until the filling begins to bubble and brown lightly and the tomatoes soften, about 45 minutes. Serve hot or at room temperature.

THIS CHERISHE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BRABYN



D PLACE

ONE OF THE MOST VENERATED traditions in the day-to-day life of a student at the University of Cambridge, the eight-centuries-old collegiate institution in Cambridge, England, is Formal Hall, a candlelit evening meal for students and faculty that's held every night during term in the great wood-paneled dining room of College Hall. I study English literature at Magdalene College, one of the university's 31 quasi-independent colleges, and my mother, Nancy Coons, a frequent contributor to *SAVEUR*, was always fascinated by my stories of the antiquated quirks and sumptuous food that characterized those meals. She decided she wanted to share this age-old dining tradition with *SAVEUR* readers, and, early last year, she and the photographer David Brabyn were allowed to accompany me to one of the dinners and document it for the magazine. She observed with visible delight the well-choreographed progression of rituals: the filing in of the college fellows as they took their seats at the high table; the striking of a gong to announce grace, which is intoned in Latin; and the service of the dishes themselves—a magnificent roast beef with yorkshire pudding, followed by a classic English sponge cake. She relished the small details: the scraping of wooden benches against the floor and the rustling of robes as attendees heeded the command “Stand in Hall!”, the flicker of candlelight reflected in the faces of the white-clad waiters as they hovered beneath the room's stained-glass windows, the dinnerware bearing the pale blue-and-yellow Magdalene College crest. My mother passed away in June 2007, a month before her first novel, *The Feasting Season*, was published, and never had the chance to tell the story of her experience there. The images on these pages poignantly capture the quiet splendor of Formal Hall, and, for me, they're a valued keepsake of that particularly memorable meal.

—Elodie Olson-Coons



CAMBRIDGE

PRELUDE TO A FEAST



A member of the Formal Hall staff sets the table for the evening meal, which commences at 7:30 P.M. Service during dinner is carefully choreographed by the college butler, also known as the buttery manager, who has the additional task of enforcing a dress code—no jeans, a coat and tie for men, a skirt or a dress for women, and black gowns for all. Previous pages, students on their way to “hall”.



Roast Beef with Yorkshire Pudding

SERVES 8

A roast served with the savory pastry known as yorkshire pudding—a frequent main course at the University of Cambridge's Formal Hall—could be called the quintessential British dinner.

- 1 3-4-lb. beef top sirloin roast, tied
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh thyme
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 1/4 cups milk
- 1 cup plus 2 tbsp. flour
- 3 large eggs
- 1 large shallot, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup red wine
- 1 cup beef stock

1. Season beef with salt and pepper. In a small bowl, mix together oil, thyme, rosemary, and garlic. Rub beef with herb mixture. Place beef in a small roasting pan, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight.

2. Remove beef from refrigerator 2 hours before you are ready to roast; allow it to come to room temperature. Meanwhile, make the yorkshire pudding batter: Whisk together milk, 1 cup flour, 1 tsp. salt, and eggs in a bowl. Cover; let batter sit at room temperature for at least 1 hour.

3. Heat oven to 500°. Remove plastic wrap and roast beef until browned, 18-20 minutes. Reduce temperature to 250°. Roast until a thermometer inserted into center of beef reads 120° (for medium rare), about 25 minutes. Remove from oven, transfer to a cutting board, and let rest, tented with foil, while you make the yorkshire pudding and gravy. Pour pan drippings into bowl, leaving about 3 tbsp. in pan. Set roasting pan aside.

4. Raise oven temperature to 450°. Spoon 1/2 tsp. reserved drippings from bowl into each cup of a nonstick muffin pan. Heat in oven for 15 minutes. Uncover batter; whisk in 1 tbsp. drippings from bowl. Remove pan from oven; pour batter evenly between cups; bake until risen and brown, about 20 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350°; bake for 10 minutes to set puddings. Remove pan from oven; set aside.

5. Make the gravy: Heat reserved roasting pan over medium heat. Add shallots; cook until soft, 4-6 minutes. Add wine; cook, scraping up browned bits, until reduced by half, 4-6 minutes. Whisk in remaining flour, followed by stock. Cook, whisking, until thick, about 5 minutes. Slice beef; serve with pudding and gravy. Garnish with chopped parsley, if you like.



A SUMPTUOUS REPAST

Seated beneath portraits of college fellows past, faculty and their guests occupy the high table, set with linens and silver candelabra, at the far end of the room, while students, seated on wood benches, dine at the other three tables. The center table is partly reserved for members of the Magdalene College choir, which, like the formerly all-male college itself, today includes both men and women.



SAVEUR
CAMBRIDGE



HIGH NOTES



Jonathan Hellyer Jones, the precentor, or choirmaster, of Magdalene College, plays the pipe organ in the college chapel. Hellyer Jones, who is also the director of college music, conducts choral evensong, or vespers, in the chapel each Thursday and Sunday evening before Formal Hall.

CAMBRIDGE

Golden Syrup Sponge Cake

This sticky dessert, sometimes called treacle sponge, is as at home in an English pub as it is at an elegant dinner, like the ones held at Formal Hall. It's traditionally baked or steamed in a pudding basin—an aluminum or earthenware bowl designed specifically for pudding—but any sturdy 3-cup ovenproof bowl will do. Heat oven to 400°. Grease a 3-cup aluminum pudding basin (see page 108) with 1 tbsp. unsalted butter; pour $\frac{2}{3}$ cup Lyle's golden syrup (an English variety of treacle syrup; see page 108) into the bottom. Set aside. Put a pot of water on to boil. Meanwhile, using a sieve set over a bowl, sift together $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour, 1 tsp. baking powder, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground ginger. Set aside. Whisk together $\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt; set aside. Using a handheld mixer set to medium speed, cream together $\frac{1}{3}$ cup superfine sugar, 8 tbsp. unsalted butter cut into small cubes, and the zest of 1 lemon in a large bowl until fluffy and pale. Add 1 egg and beat for 15 seconds; repeat with 1 more egg. Reduce mixer speed to low and alternately add the flour mixture and the milk mixture in 3 batches, beginning and ending with the flour. Scrape down sides of bowl with a rubber spatula; briefly beat batter until smooth and silky. Pour batter into prepared pudding basin and cover basin with a sheet of wax paper, followed by a sheet of foil. Press foil around edges to seal; tie kitchen twine around rim to secure. (We suggest using the paper and foil even if your basin comes with a lid, which won't trap moisture so well on its own.) Place an 8" x 8" baking dish on middle rack of oven, set basin in center, and pour in enough boiling water from the pot that it reaches halfway up sides of basin. Bake until cake is puffed slightly and set, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Carefully remove cake from the water; let rest for 5 minutes. Uncover cake and invert onto a serving dish. (Scrape out any bits stuck to inside of basin and spread on top of cake.) Drizzle more golden syrup over cake before serving. Serves 6–8.





THE ENGLISH WAY



A wheel of stilton, with biscuits and port wine—a typical final course served, by the light of a wood fire, in the Senior Combination Room, to which college faculty members (and the occasional favored student) retire after finishing their meal in the adjacent Formal Hall dining room.

GUESTS OF HONOR



Brian Deakin, an emeritus fellow at Magdalene College and the former assistant director of the Department of Applied Economics at Cambridge, seated at the high table with other instructors.



It is just past sunset, and a breeze is coming off the water as we wade into the salt marsh that fringes Jamaica Bay, on New York City's southeastern edge. The tide has receded, and my companions and I must walk several hundred yards with our pole nets, flashlights, and buckets before the water reaches our knees. I stop for a moment to ponder the singularity of this place, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, a 9,155-acre wilderness that is home to the marsh, freshwater ponds, a terrapin nesting area, and some 325 species of birds, all paradoxically situated within



Rites of Spring

For a Vietnamese-American family, celebrating a new life means feasting on fresh-caught crabs and traditional dishes

BY THEODORE ROSS PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI



The author's family preparing rolls called bò bía, above. Previous pages, from left, beer-steamed crabs; crabbers in Queens, New York.

CRAB SEASON

the urban sprawl of Brooklyn and Queens.

I stand in the tidal waters and watch a slow-moving A train pull in to the Broad Channel station in the near distance, disturbing a small flock of egrets in the high grass. Behind me, the tread of auto traffic on a high-rise bridge mingles with the roar of jet planes flying into and out of JFK airport just a few miles away. I mention to my uncle-in-law, Vinh—a tall, handsome Vietnamese man with a mustache and a leading-man smile—that a cold beer might do me good about now. Vinh shakes his head and urges me to be patient, reminding me of tonight's special purpose: to prepare for my son's one-month birthday party, a Vietnamese tradition, which is just a few days away. For that, we require a particular treasure that the bay offers up with abundance: *Callinectes sapidus*, "savory, beautiful swimmer", better known as blue crab.

We move deeper into the marsh, and it soon becomes apparent that we are not alone. Over the splash of our footsteps I can discern a veritable United Nations of languages—Mandarin, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi, Haitian Creole, Jamaican patois. I find that curious, as Vinh has assured me that this was a "secret" crabbing spot a friend clued him into years ago; he has been coming here for blue crab from late spring to early fall for the past decade, when the water is warm and the crabs migrate into the bay's shallow waters.

I switch on my flashlight and aim it into the water, illuminating a forest of tangled seaweed. Within moments, a stout blue crab appears, beating a hasty path near my feet along the bay's sandy bottom. I position my net in its way and snatch it from the water before it can scuttle away. A visual inspection confirms

that the tips of its claws are greenish blue—it's a male—and that its shell stretches at least four and a half inches wide, which means I can legally harvest it. I feel a surge of pride at making a catch so fast, until I look up and notice Vinh grinning at me, 30 plump crabs already thrashing in his net.

I LIVE WITH MY wife, Hường, and my newborn son, Jerod, in a three-bedroom walk-up in Park Slope, Brooklyn, a 30-minute drive from Jamaica Bay. Our home stands next door to the brownstone where Hường was raised and in which three generations of her family have lived since fleeing Vietnam by boat nearly 30 years ago. Residing in such close proximity to one's in-laws has its challenges. Our lives have intertwined in ways I never imagined possible (or desirable) prior to meeting my wife, ten years ago, when I was a freelance writer in Ho Chi Minh City and she was a Fulbright scholar making her first trip back to Vietnam. With time, however, the joys of marital privacy gave way to the satisfactions of familial assistance. It is true that my in-laws enter my apartment without knocking; it is also true that they walk our dog when we are at work.

The pleasure that the family I married into derives from food almost defies description. Six people reside in my in-laws' home with five well-stocked refrigerators to do their bidding. When I arrived for my first dinner at the house—I was known then only as "the boyfriend who speaks Vietnamese"—with a basket of ripe mangoes and an affinity for fish sauce, I found an easy welcome. Meals operate as the social fulcrum around which all family life pivots.

So, it comes as no surprise that, despite the fact

METHOD

Cua Hấp Bia

(Beer-Steamed Crabs)

In this dish, fresh blue crabs are steamed in a flavorful mixture of chile, garlic, lime, and beer. For a source for hard-to-find Asian ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 108. First, make the dipping sauce: Whisk together 4 tbsp. fish sauce, 2 small stemmed red or green Thai chiles sliced into thin rings, and the juice of 2 limes. Set aside. Rinse 12 live blue crabs (about 4 lbs.; see page 100) under running water. Pour four 12-oz. bottles of lager beer into a 6-quart pot; bring to a boil over high heat. Add 2 tsp. kosher salt, 10 smashed cloves garlic, 3 stemmed and split Thai chiles, and 1 bunch cilantro. Squeeze in juice from 2 halved limes; add limes. Add crabs to pot; cook, covered, until they turn a vibrant reddish-orange, about 8 minutes. Using tongs, transfer crabs to a platter. Serve with sauce. Serves 2-4. (See sidebar, below, for instructions on eating.)

that it's almost midnight, the entire family has waited up to sample some of the crabs I caught with Vinh. My mother-in-law, who, since the day I married Hường, has insisted that I call her Me (Vietnamese for Mom), and Thúy, the eldest of my four sisters-in-law, immediately begin washing the crabs in the sink. Most are reserved for Jerod's party, but we also steam a heaping portion in water and Brooklyn Lager, a local beer, and pluck them from the pot after they've turned bright red. More beers emerge, and the family descends on the seafood, rending the shells by hand (see "How to Eat a Blue Crab", below,

THEODORE ROSS is an editor at Harper's magazine. This is his first article for SAVEUR.

HOW TO EAT A BLUE CRAB



Turn the crab over so that its belly faces you. Using your fingers, lift up its heart-shaped apron, or tail, and pull it back to snap it off of the body.



Using your hands or a table knife, remove the top shell from the bottom of the body, twisting and prying it off.



Remove the gills, often called "dead man's fingers", which are attached to either side of the crab. (The yellowish "mustard" and orange roe are edible.) Crack the body down the center.



Press lightly on the body where the back legs, or "swimmers", are attached and pop out the backfin meat in the rear of the crab. Extract the rest of the body meat with your fingers. Remove the claws.



Using a cracker or a small wooden mallet, gently crack open the claws. Scrape the meat out of the claws with your fingers or a table knife.

CRAB SEASON

RECIPE

Bún Riêu Cua

(Crab Soup)

SERVES 6-8

A staple of home cooks all over Vietnam, this soup (facing page) owes its rich body and deep flavor to a homemade broth made by simmering crab shells and dried shrimp in water. For a source for hard-to-find Asian ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 108.

- 1 16-oz. package thin bún (Vietnamese rice vermicelli)
- 10 live blue crabs (about 3½ lbs.; see page 100)
- ½ cup small dried shrimp
- 3 egg whites, beaten
- 5 tbsp. corn oil
- 5 scallions (green parts cut crosswise into thirds, white parts thinly sliced)
- 2½ tbsp. paprika
- 1 tbsp. fine shrimp sauce, plus more for serving (optional)
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 3 medium tomatoes, cored and each cut into 8 wedges
- 2 cups mung bean sprouts
- 1 cup loosely packed mint leaves
- 1 cup loosely packed purple perilla (called *tía tô*) or basil
- Asian chile sauce, preferably Sriracha, for serving

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the rice vermicelli and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender but firm to the bite, 1-3 minutes. Drain in a strainer and rinse under cold water. Set aside.

2. Rinse crabs thoroughly under cold running water. In a 10-quart pot, bring 6 quarts of water to a boil over high heat. Add crabs and cook, covered, until the shells turn a vibrant reddish orange, about 8 minutes. Using tongs, transfer crabs to a large bowl; let cool slightly. Set the pot of crab broth aside.

3. Working with 1 crab at a time, use a table knife to pry off top shell. With a small spoon, scoop out the brownish-yellow innards (also known as the mustard) and roe (if present) attached to the inside of top shell; transfer to a bowl. Place top shell in pot of reserved crab broth. Pull off and discard fingerlike gills attached to bottom of crab. (Rinse out any sand lodged behind gills.) Break the bottom shell in half, extract the meat with your fingers, and add it to the bowl of innards. Transfer bottom shell to the pot of reserved broth. Crack claws; add to broth. In the end, you should have about 1 cup of the crab mixture; set aside.

4. Put the pot of crab broth and shells over high heat; bring to a boil. Lower the heat to medium and simmer, without stirring, about 30 minutes. Strain the broth through a fine-mesh sieve. Transfer 15 cups broth to a 6-quart pot; set aside. (Reserve remaining broth for another use.)

5. Meanwhile, combine the dried shrimp with 1½ cups water; bring to a boil. Lower the heat to medium-low; simmer until soft, about 15 minutes. Strain over a bowl, reserving shrimp and liquid separately.

6. Purée the softened dried shrimp in a food processor to a coarse paste. Add reserved crab mixture; pulse to combine. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the egg whites. Set crab mixture aside.

7. In a small saucepan, heat 3 tbsp. oil over medium heat. Add green scallion pieces; cook until slightly wilted, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Return pan to medium-low heat; heat remaining oil. Add paprika; cook, stirring frequently, until it turns a deep, brick red color, about 5 minutes. Set pan aside.

8. Combine crab broth and shrimp liquid; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; add shrimp sauce, sugar, and tomatoes and simmer the soup until tomatoes are slightly softened, about 20 minutes.

9. Break reserved crab mixture into little pieces. Sprinkle over soup; they'll drop to the bottom. Simmer soup, without stirring, until mixture floats to surface to form somewhat puffy top layer resembling cooked egg whites, 3-5 minutes. Drizzle paprika mixture over soup; sprinkle with cooked and raw scallions.

10. To serve: Mix the sprouts, mint, and perilla in a bowl; set on the table along with the shrimp and chile sauces. Divide the reserved noodles between serving bowls and ladle some of the soup into each bowl. Garnish bowls with the herb mixture and sauces to taste.

for a good technique) and dipping the sweet, opalescent flesh in a sauce made of lime, nước mắm (the pungent Vietnamese condiment made from fermented anchovies), and fiery chiles fresh from Me's backyard garden. We eat until we run the risk of growing our own claws and then go happily to bed.

A FEW DAYS LATER, we are again gathered in the kitchen, this time to prepare food for the more than two dozen relatives and friends who will arrive the following day to commemorate Jerod's birthday. Celebrating the safe completion of a newborn's first month of life is a centuries-old ritual in Vietnam. Traditionally, mother and child were confined at home for about 30 days following the birth. Only when that period was complete and the child seemed likely to survive would the family acknowledge the new arrival with a party. Friends and relatives come bearing gifts, and a ceremonial offering of food is made to the deceased ancestors whose photographs adorn the household altar; incense is lit, respects paid. My family, however, does none of this. When I ask my father-in-law, Bó (Dad), why he does not follow the old ways, he half-jokingly replies that the family is too "lazy". They just want to eat.

The party will be held in my in-laws' eat-in kitchen and backyard, a 10-by-20-foot cement-and-dirt rectangle cut from the city's urban desert. There, Me raises, along with the chiles, a farm stand's worth of bitter melon, golf ball-size white eggplants, and herbs—Thai basil, purple perilla (a cousin of shiso, with a flavor like cinnamon's), spicy Vietnamese mint, and culantro (a grassy, peppery herb related to cilantro). This, by the way, is a Vietnamese garden in the truest sense: a distant cousin brought the seeds into the country years ago.

Crab holds pride of place among the dishes we prepare for the party. There will be bún riêu cua, a crab soup whose ingredients epitomize Vietnamese geography and history. The crab, similar in taste to the crab varieties the family ate in Vietnam, represents the country's coastal bounty; the bún, or rice vermicelli, comes from China, Vietnam's cultural big brother and occasional occupier; and the paprika that lends the soup its auburn hue and smoky aroma is a legacy of the European spice traders who once plied Vietnam's waters. We will also serve chả giò cua, fried crab spring rolls, accompanied by nước chấm, the dipping sauce whose salty-sweetness, laced with fish sauce, constitutes one of the cuisine's bedrock flavors. (continued on page 96)





Purple perilla and Vietnamese balm grown in Bui's garden, above. Facing page, Vietnamese dipping sauce.



CRAB SEASON

(continued from page 92) I watch Me make nước chấm. She measures nothing, adding sugar and chopped chiles and garlic to a bowl of fish sauce with a confident hand. "I mix," she says as she gives the ingredients a swirl with a chopstick, "and then I taste." She places the tip of the utensil in her mouth and coughs, her eyes welling with tears. "Perfect," she says. For the spring rolls, Me mixes crabmeat with ground pork and finely minced shrimp. She adds rice vermicelli, carrots, and shallots. Finally, she places a dollop of the mixture on the bottom edge of a spring roll wrapper, folds in the edges, and deftly rolls it into a neat cylinder. She sets the rolls aside for tomorrow, when she will fry them before the guests arrive.

The kitchen is crowded and alive with chatter. Sinh, a family friend, chops jicama for bò bía, the fresh rice paper rolls stuffed with Chi-

nese sausage, cooked egg, and herbs. Bó mashes lemongrass, ginger, and garlic with the back of a cleaver on a cutting board for a grilled-meat marinade. Teenage cousins wander into the kitchen for snacks, then disappear upstairs to play video games. Huồng splits her time tending to Jerod and offering wry commentary on my spring roll wrapping attempts.

The conversation drifts to Vietnam, and I urge my in-laws to recount the family's flight from the country, a story they've never fully shared with me before. Life under the repressive Communist government after the war was unbearable, they say. There was no future for their children in Vietnam. So, like hundreds of thousands of other so-called boat people, they chose to escape, leaving Ho Chi Minh City in the middle of the night, four young daughters in tow, and undertaking a tense road journey

Below, from left, ingredients for fresh spring rolls, called bò bía; the author's father-in-law, Thach Phung, eating a bowl of crab soup. Facing page, cabbage and crab salad.



METHOD

Nước Chấm

(Vietnamese Dipping Sauce)

This classic Vietnamese condiment—balancing sweet, spicy, and sour flavors—is an essential accompaniment to the fried spring rolls shown on page 98. It's also great with grilled beef or pork. Pile 1 tbsp. sugar, 2 cloves garlic, and 1 stemmed Thai chile on a cutting board and roughly chop everything together. Using the side of the knife, scrape the garlic-chile mixture into a rough paste. Transfer the paste to a medium bowl and whisk in 3 tbsp. sugar and 1 cup warm water until the sugar dissolves. This will take about 30 seconds. Whisk in 4 tbsp. fish sauce (see page 108), 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice, 1 small stemmed Thai chile sliced into thin rings, and 1/8 cup julienned carrot. Let the sauce sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes to allow the flavors to come together; stir well before serving. The sauce will keep for up to 2 weeks in the refrigerator. Makes 1 1/3 cups.



RECIPE

Gỏi Bắp Cải Gà Cua

(Crab and Cabbage Salad)

SERVES 4

Dressed with fresh lime juice, fish sauce, garlic, and Thai chiles, this refreshingly tart salad makes the perfect accompaniment to the beer-steamed crabs on page 91. For the best results when preparing this dish, use jumbo lump crabmeat, which is prized for its large, sweet chunks, which are virtually free of pieces of shell and cartilage.

- 1 medium head savoy cabbage (about 1 lb.), cored
- 1 large carrot
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lime juice
- 4 tsp. fish sauce (see page 108)
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 large Thai chile, stemmed and finely chopped
- 1 small skinless boneless chicken breast half (about $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. medium shrimp, unpeeled
- $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. jumbo lump crabmeat, picked through to remove any bits of shell
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup roughly torn cilantro leaves
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Finely chopped toasted peanuts, for garnish

1. Using a large knife, cut the head of cabbage into quarters. Cut one quarter in half lengthwise, then slice the 2 pieces crosswise into thin ribbons. (Reserve remaining cabbage for another use.) Using the large-holed side of a box grater, grate the carrot into a large bowl. Add the cabbage, lime juice, fish sauce, garlic, and chile; mix well and set aside to let the cabbage wilt slightly and allow the flavors to intensify.

2. Bring 4 cups water to a boil in a small saucepan. Add chicken, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until just cooked through, about 10 minutes. Using tongs, transfer chicken to a plate. Return the water to a boil, add the shrimp, and cook until opaque, 2–3 minutes. Drain shrimp and transfer to the plate with the chicken. Let the chicken and shrimp cool.

3. Tear the chicken apart into thin, lacy shreds. Peel the shrimp and remove their tails. Cut each shrimp into 4 equal-size pieces.

4. Add the chicken, shrimp, crabmeat, and cilantro to the cabbage mixture; toss to combine. (Season with salt, if you like.) Transfer the cabbage salad to a platter and sprinkle with the peanuts.

RECIPE

Chả Giò Cua

(Crab Spring Rolls)

SERVES 4-6

For making spring rolls, most Vietnamese-American home cooks use the spongy, wheat-based wrappers called TYJ Spring Roll Pastry, which are made by the Spring Home company. They're available frozen at most Asian food stores. For illustrated step-by-step instructions on how to fill and wrap these rolls, go to SAVEUR.COM/SPRINGROLLS. To find a source for hard-to-find Asian ingredients see [THE PANTRY](#), page 108.

- 4 lb. backfin crabmeat (small chunks from the rear fin area), picked through to remove any bits of shell
- 4 lb. medium shrimp, finely chopped
- 3 oz. ground pork
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. grated carrot (use the large-holed side of a box grater)
- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 large shallots, finely chopped
- 12 8"-square spring roll wrappers
- 1 oz. bún (Vietnamese rice vermicelli), cooked according to step 1 in crab soup recipe on page 92
- 1 egg white, beaten
- Corn oil, for frying
- 12 bibb lettuce leaves, for garnish
- 12 sprigs Thai basil, for garnish
- 12 purple perilla leaves (called *tía tô*), for garnish (optional)
- Nước chấm (see page 96 for recipe)

1. Stir together crabmeat, shrimp, pork, garlic, carrots, salt, pepper, and shallots; set filling aside.

2. Make rolls: Working with 1 wrapper at a time, arrange wrapper so that a corner faces you. (Keep remaining wrappers covered with a damp towel.) Place 2 tbsp. crab mixture and 1 tbsp. vermicelli on bottom third of wrapper, near corner facing you. Brush top corner with a little egg white. Lift bottom corner of wrapper over filling; pull wrapper back against filling to tighten cylinder. Fold in sides; roll cylinder forward, to form a 4"-long roll about 1" thick. Transfer to a platter.

3. Pour oil into a large pot to a depth of 2"; heat over medium heat until a deep-fry thermometer inserted into oil reaches 350°. Fry rolls until golden brown and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Using tongs, transfer rolls to a paper towel-lined plate. To serve, wrap lettuce, basil, and perilla around rolls; serve with nước chấm.

CRAB SEASON

south to the Mekong Delta, where, for a thousand dollars a head, they secured transport on a cramped wooden fishing boat bound for Malaysia. The crew almost immediately lost its way in the South China Sea, but after three perilous days adrift, the craft was discovered by an oil tanker, which led it to Malaysia's Pulau Bidong Island, where the family spent a year in a refugee camp before being granted asylum in the United States. They took few material possessions with them; for that reason, these recipes, flavors, and kitchen techniques have become incalculably valuable, standing in for the lost photo albums, the old friends never heard from again, and all the cherished things they left behind.

I WANDER INTO THE kitchen the next morning carrying Jerod, whom Hường and



Left, crab spring rolls. Right, a family portrait: the author (top row, center, in blue) with his in-laws, Thai Bui (center, in purple shirt) and Thach Phùng (behind her); his wife, Hường (holding baby); and others.

I have dressed (adorably, I might add) for the party in brand-new blue overalls. Breakfast is a bowl of phở, the Vietnamese noodle soup, redolent of star anise and cloves, which Me makes every few weeks in quantities grand enough to feed a small army. By early afternoon, the party food has been set out on the kitchen table. Along with the dishes we prepared the night before, there's cabbage and crab salad, barbecued pork and chicken, and, for dessert, a sweet soup called chè, which was made with chunks of yuca, banana, and mung beans. I remember how strange a dessert made with beans seemed to me when I

first tried that dish; the fact that I'm now a convert reminds me of how much a part of the family I have become.

We stack the spring rolls, more than a hundred of them, in a pyramid next to the crab soup, with its clean fragrance of the sea; fresh herbs, harvested from the garden, sit on a plate nearby, ready to be added to the soup. When all the cousins and siblings and friends

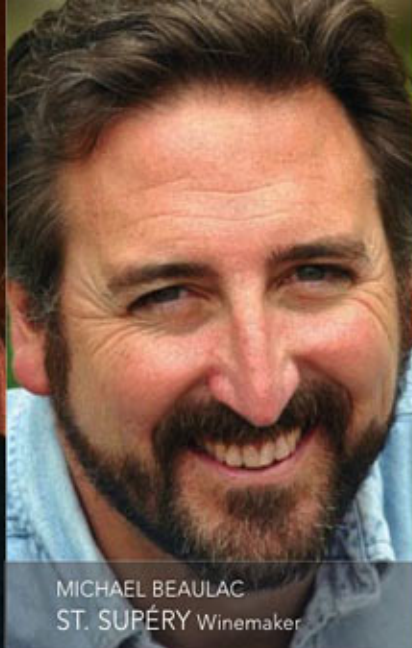
W A guide to purchasing crabmeat at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE111

have arrived, we survey the spread and a hush falls over the house. Our attack is swift, efficient, relentless. We pile our plates high and settle into couches in the kitchen or perch on chairs in the garden. The meal ends in less than an hour. Hường chats with an older sister, who surprised us by flying here from Los Angeles. My





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IN THE SAVEUR

KITCHEN

Discoveries, Tales, and Techniques from Our Favorite Room in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman

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NORTH AMERICAN CRAB

The many crab species fished from North America's coastal waters vary greatly in size, appearance, taste, and texture and lend themselves to an immense array of dishes (see "Rites of Spring", page 88). There are six varieties that we use the most and are commercially available, either live, cooked, frozen, or in lump form (that is, picked and packaged). Weighing 11 pounds or more on average and achieving a leg span of up to six feet from tip to tip, the majestic king crab **1** is harvested in the Arctic waters of the Bering Sea. Three distinct species are sold under the name king crab, though *Lithodes aequispinus* (golden or brown king crab; pictured) is the most widely available. The king's exceptionally sweet leg meat has a silky richness that is comparable to—and, some contend, exceeds—that of lobster meat. The most popular crab variety along much of the Eastern seaboard is the sweet-tasting blue crab **2**. Male blue crabs are usually meatier than the females and thus tend to be the best for preparations that call for eating the crabs whole—the preferred method among many Easterners, especially denizens of the Chesapeake Bay region, a primary fishing area. (Softshell blue crabs are available in the spring and summer, when the crustaceans molt their hard outer shells.) Stone crabs **3** are fished solely for the clean-tasting meat of the animals' reddish-orange, black-tipped right claw, which harvesters snap off from the live catch before throwing the crab back into the water, where it will grow a new appendage. Stone crabs are commercially fished from the Carolinas south to the Caribbean and Mexico; they're a celebrated delicacy in Florida, where cooks serve them with a mustard sauce. The meaty claws, legs, and body of succulent dungeness crab **4**, which range from six to nine inches wide when the crab is harvested, have helped to make it the principal commercially fished variety along the Pacific coast. A favorite preparation for dungeness crab is cioppino, a Portuguese-style seafood stew that originated in San Francisco. The snow crab **5**, also known as queen crab, has strikingly long legs, which constitute the only part of the crab sold commercially. Snow crab legs, like king crab legs, are most commonly sold frozen because of the remoteness of the fishing grounds, most of which are also concentrated in Alaska. Snow crabs' sweet, briny flavor matches up beautifully with drawn butter. The reddish-brown jonah crab **6**, long popular on New England tables and found mostly in the North Atlantic, has a relatively neutral flavor and is a good choice for making crab cakes and salads. (See page 108 for a source for crabs.) —Ben Mims

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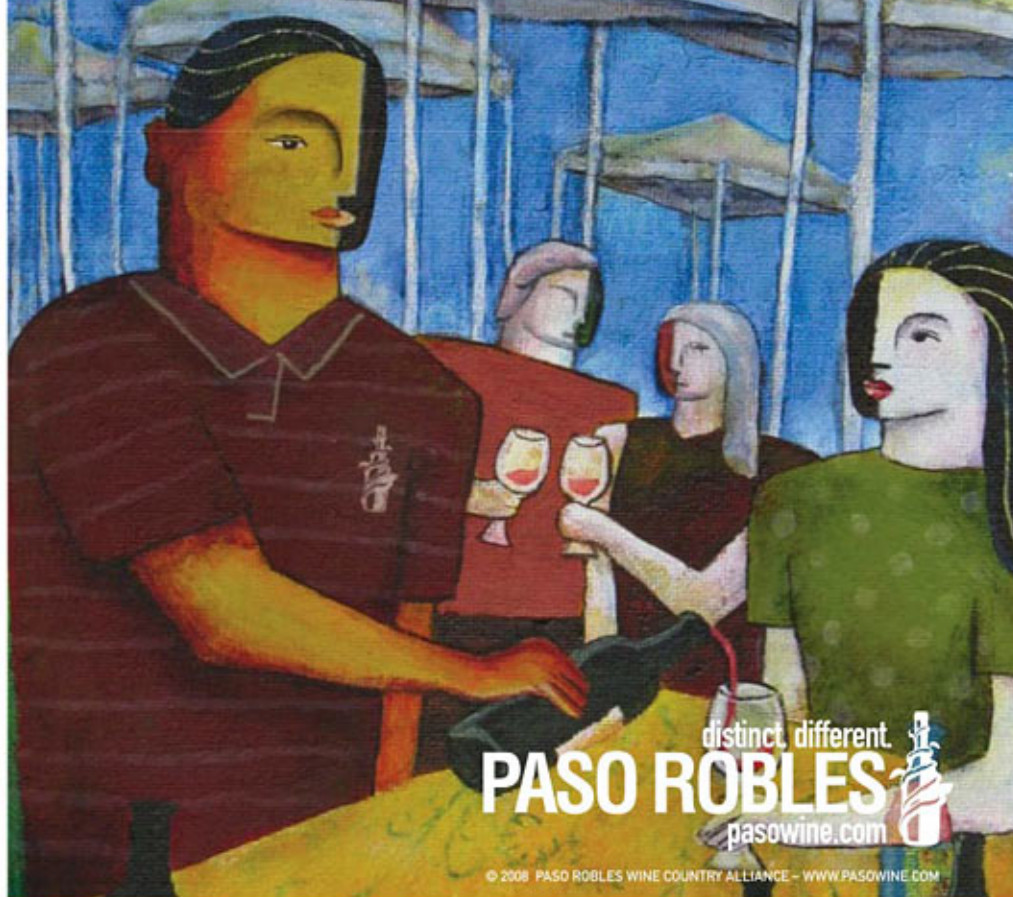
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Sticky Business

Though it's used infrequently in the United States, honeylike golden syrup, also known as light treacle, is a mainstay in the kitchens of Great Britain, where it's drizzled over porridge at breakfast or, for dessert, over sweets like the sponge cake shown on page 85. It has a boldly sweet yet nuanced flavor that plays perfectly against those foods. The ingredient is a felicitous by-product of the conversion of sugarcane juice into crystallized sugar. Tate and Lyle is the only producer of the syrup; cans of it bear the slogan "Out of the strong came forth sweetness", which comes from the Old Testament. We've never fully understood the allusion, but no matter; we love the golden goodness within. —Jocelyn Laporte

Saveur Library

These books were particularly helpful in preparing this issue. We recommend them for your own library.

CLEORA'S KITCHENS by Cleora Butler (Council Oak Books, 1985). In this evocative memoir, the author shares the story of her life as an African-American cook in Oklahoma.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FISH COOKERY by A. J. McClane (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977). This comprehensive volume is a trusted reference on identifying and cooking fish and shellfish.



Open Sesame

Sesame oil, whose nutty flavor has long been prized in many South Asian, East Asian, and Mediterranean cuisines, makes an appearance in several of this issue's recipes, including the Japanese fried rice on page 75 and the Cypriot eggs and greens on page 64. Though all sesame oils come from sesame seeds, their character varies depending on the variety of seed used (they can be white, red, brown, or black) and the different production methods employed for making them. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds. Light-hued oils, popular in South Asian and Mediterranean kitchens, are made from white sesame seeds that have been cold-pressed at temperatures below 113°. Dark-colored oils, favored in East Asia, are pressed from roasted white or black seeds. Here are five varieties and brands that represent the breadth of flavors this kitchen staple can exhibit. In India, sesame oil is called gingelly or til; **1 Idhayam Gingelly**, a golden-hued oil available at South Asian shops, has a peanutty and slightly caramel undertone, owing to the addition of palm sugar. Pale golden, light-textured **2 Loriva Extra-Virgin Sesame Oil**, a domestic, cold-pressed oil available at many gourmet markets, is similar to the kind produced in Cyprus. Clean tasting and well balanced, it's a great all-purpose oil. Made with roasted sesame seeds, the orange-colored **3 Kadoya Hot Sesame Oil**, sold at Chinese, Japanese, and Korean markets, is derived from roasted sesame seeds and has a peppery punch, achieved by the addition of chiles, and tends to work better as a condiment—drizzled over steamed fish, for example—than as a cooking medium. **4 Kadoya 100 Percent Pure Sesame Oil** also comes from roasted seeds (and is also sold in East Asian food stores); it has a pleasingly bitter, smoky flavor. Toasted black sesame seeds are the source of another East Asian-style variety, **5 Union Food Pure Black Sesame Oil**, which has a distinctive coffee color and a bracing, tannic flavor. Union Food's general manager, Daniel Chen, calls it a "two-drop oil" because a little goes a long way. —Hunter Lewis

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KITCHEN



Hot Tip

MONITORING OIL temperature is crucial when you're frying foods like the spring rolls on page 98: too hot, and the rolls will burn; not hot enough, and they'll come out greasy. A deep-fry thermometer is one way to go, but there's another method that appeals to the minimalist in us. Cooks throughout Asia simply stick an unvarnished wooden or bamboo chopstick into the oil to test the heat. If the oil is hot enough, a steady stream of bubbles will issue from the submerged end of the chopstick. According to Brian Farkas, a professor of food science at North Carolina State University and an expert on heat transfer in immersion frying, the bubbles form because moisture trapped in trace amounts inside the wood or bamboo, when exposed to the hot oil, boils and escapes as steam. The hotter the oil, the more bubbles there will be. When we tested this method, we kept a thermometer handy to see how reliable a gauge of temperature the chopstick would be. As the mercury edged toward 320 degrees, a frail line of bubbles began to emanate from the chopstick's tip. When we gave the chopstick a dip at 350 degrees—the ideal temperature for frying the spring rolls—there was a swirl of bubbles all over. And by 375, the swirl had reached Jacuzzi-esque force. It takes a few fry-ups to master the reading of bubble intensity as clearly as one would the mercury in a thermometer, but once one has, there's something wonderfully Zen about dispensing with cooking by the numbers. —Beth Kracklauer

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KITCHEN

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Culinary travel is the newest way to immerse yourself in a culture

Culinary vacations, whether they involve cooking lessons or guided sampling, are becoming increasingly popular among vacationers looking for much more than a beach and a cocktail. No longer the province of the gourmand, food-related travel is revealing itself to be a highly rewarding experience for seasoned explorers looking for imaginative ways to discover a place they know and love, inveterate cooks in search of new techniques, or first-time tourists hoping for an alternative to sightseeing.

The options for culinary travel are numerous and continue to multiply. Whether one prefers to stay close to home or venture halfway across the world, it's easy to find tour operators, cooking schools, hotels, and individual cooks offering tours, demonstrations, and classes geared toward visitors who want to learn about local foods and traditional cooking methods.

Less hands-on options include curated dining or tours of markets and specialty food shops; the more interactive ones can range from one-day workshops to weeklong retreats with intensive cooking classes



featuring top chefs and food artisans. Some of the most comprehensive packages even comprise art history classes, walking tours of local sites, or tour guides to other activities.

Travelers come home with tales of how the chef at a famous restaurant sat at their table and gave them a detailed explication of their meal. Or they return bursting with glowing descriptions of the markets they've visited and the people and ingredients they met: chicharrón and pastes for making mole from the *mercado* in Mexico's Tepoztlán; choritos, the prelude to every meal, from the coast of Peru; pomegranates or prunes selected from the souks of Fez for sweetening a chicken tagine.

Once travelers are back home, replicating a regional specialty is a sure way to convince friends and family that the trip really happened, much more persuasive than the rubies that Marco Polo displayed at a dinner party to prove that his accounts of China were true: skeptics believed he'd never traveled at all. If only he had learned to make chow fan!



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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered food products and destinations too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY GEORGIA FREEDMAN

Fare

To make the Chinese barbecued spareribs, purchase **Chinese five spice powder** (P) (\$4.99 for a 2-ounce pack), available at Kalustyan's (800/352-3451; www.kalustyans.com). When you're in Oklahoma, visit these culinary highlights: **Ann's Chicken Fry** (4106 Northwest 39th Expressway, Oklahoma City; 405/943-8915); **Palace Café** (1301 East 15th Street, Tulsa; 918/582-4321); the **Local Table** (4329 South Peoria Ave, Tulsa; 918/794-8013); the **Coach House** (6437 Avondale Drive, Nichols Hills Plaza, Oklahoma City; 405/842-1000); **Musashi's** (4315 North Western Avenue, Oklahoma City; 405/602-5623); **Meers Store & Restaurant** (Highway 115, Lawton; 580/429-8051); **Nancy Fulton's Fried Pies** (exit 51 off Interstate 35; 580/369-7830); **Lovera's Family Grocery** (95 West Sixth Street, Krebs; 800/854-1417; www.iloveitalian.com); **StableRidge Winery** (2016 Route 66 West, Stroud; 800/359-3990); **Elmer's BBQ** (4130 South Peoria Avenue, Tulsa; 918/742-6702); **Banh Mi Bale** (2426 North Classen Boulevard, Oklahoma City; 405/524-2660); and the **Wichita Buffalo Company** (28580 Highway 37, Hinton; 405/542-6015; www.sandyspringsfarms.com). **Oklahoma pecans** (prices range from \$26.50 for a 5-pound bag to \$94.75 for a 10-pound bag, depending on quality; prices include shipping) can be purchased from the Sooner Pecan Company (918/367-5529; www.soonerpecan.com). **Nancy Fulton's Fried Pies**, **Lovera's Family Grocery**, and the **Wichita Buffalo Company** (see above) also sell their specialties by mail order.

Kitchenwise

For information and schedules for Chunyi Zhou's **cooking classes**, contact her directly (86/10/8401-4788; www.hutongcuisine.com).

Ingredient

Southwestern Produce (770/339-6444; www.southwesternproduce.com) carries many varieties of fresh-frozen **Southern peas** (P) (\$9.50 each for a 5-pound bag).

Crab Season

For a source for **live blue crabs**, see Kitchen (below). Visit Kalustyan's (800/352-3451; www.kalustyans.com) for the following hard-to-find Asian ingredients: small **dried shrimp** (P) (\$6.99 for a ¾-ounce bag), **fine shrimp sauce** (P) (\$10.99 for a 12-ounce jar), **rice vermicelli** (P) (\$7.99 for a 7-ounce bag); and **fish sauce** (P) (\$9.99 for a 725-ml bottle). Melissa's/World Variety Produce carries **purple perilla** (P) (prices range from \$9 to \$15 for one pound, depending on the season; ask for "red" perilla) for the crab soup and the crab spring rolls. AsianWok.com (800/300-6346; www.asianwok.com) carries **spring roll wrappers** (P) (\$2.08 for a 12-ounce package of TYJ brand) for making the fried crab spring rolls.

Brown Rice

Massa Organics's **brown rice** (P) (\$4.00 for a 2-pound bag) can be purchased directly from the farm (530/519-8628; www.massaorganics.com). The smoked **chorizo** (P) (\$5.50 for a package of five links) for the chicken and brown rice with chorizo is available at Despaña Brand Foods (888/779-8617; www.despanabrandfoods.com; ask for "chorizo traditional"). For hard-to-find varieties of brown rice, contact Lundberg Family Farms (630/343-0240; www.lundberg.com) for brown **basmati rice** (P) (\$4.49 for a 32-ounce bag); Lotus Foods (866/972-6879; www.lotusfoods.com) for brown **jasmine rice** (P) (\$4.99 for a two-pound bag), **kalijira rice** (P), and **red rice** (P) (\$3.99 each for a 15-ounce bag); and Chef Shop (800/596-0885; www.chefshop.com) for Japanese **haiga-mai rice** (P) (\$14.99 for a five-pound bag; ask for Tamaki haiga short-grain rice). Adriana's Caravan (800/316-0820; www.adrianascaravan.com) carries whole **chiles de árbol** (P) (\$4.95 for a two-ounce package) for making the Japanese-style fried brown rice.

Cyprus

Adrianna's Caravan (800/316-0820; www.adrianascaravan.com) carries dried **fava beans** (P) (\$3.95 for a 20-ounce bag) for the fava bean stew with garlic, thyme, and bay leaves, as well as a variety of other goods, including walnut-based **spoon sweets** (P) (\$24.95 for a 960-gram jar) **grape must candies** (P) (\$13.95 for a 1-pound pack), **carob syrup** (P) (\$9.95 for a 700-gram bottle), and **caper leaves** (P) (\$5.95 price for a 270-gram jar). For a selection of **Cypriot wines**, contact Athenee Importers (516/505-4800; www.atheneeimporters.com) and Nestor Imports (800/775-8857; www.nestorimports.com).

Cambridge

To make the golden syrup sponge cake, purchase a **3-cup aluminum pudding basin** (P) (\$11.95) from Sur La Table (800/243-0852; www.surlatable.com; ask for a six-inch tinned steel melon mold) and **Lyle's golden syrup** (P) (\$3.56 for a 1-pound tin) from the English Tea Store (877/734-2458; www.englishteastore.com).

Kitchen

To purchase the crabs shown in our glossary, contact FishEx (888/926-3474; www.fishex.com) for **king crab** (P) legs and claws (\$19.95 for one pound), **dungeness crab** (P) legs (\$14.95 a pound), and **snow crab** (P) legs (\$12.95 a pound); the Crab Place (877/328-2722; www.crabplace.com) for live **blue crabs** (P) (prices range from \$44.99 for six to \$219.00 a bushel, based on the grade and size of the crabs); Fresh Choice Seafood (305/498-8500; www.freshchoiceseafood.com) for **stone crab** (P) claws (\$21.99 to \$37.99 for one pound of claws, in varying sizes); and the Fresh Lobster Company (508/451-2467; www.thefreshlobstercompany.com) for **Jonah crab** (P) (\$7.99 for one live crab, \$11.95 for six claws, or \$24.75 for a 16-ounce tub of picked meat).

Items marked with P also appear, with photographs, in our Visual Pantry at www.saveur.com/visualpantry111.

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M O M E N T



TIME 5:40 P.M., August 25, 2006

PLACE Shangri-La (formerly Zhongdian), Yunnan Province, China

At a market dedicated solely to the buying and selling of matsutake mushrooms, a forager sells prized wares.

PHOTOGRAPH BY REUTERS/NIR ELIAS



THE OREGON SUPER MARKET

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Samah LoGiudice, Organic Farmer, Lake Oswego Farmers Market, Lake Oswego, Oregon



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